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Approaches to Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing in the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program

Natalie McWilliams

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**Approaches to Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing in the HUD Sustainable Communities
Regional Planning Grant Program**

Natalie McWilliams

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
Master of Community Planning and Development
Edmund S. Muskie School of Public Service
University of Southern Maine
Advisor: Professor Jack Kartez

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the early response to the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement as part of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant (SCRPG) program. Drawing from the work of a subset of ten grantees across the United States, this analysis investigates the innovative ways planning organizations are working to fulfill this unique requirement. An overview of the grant program is discussed followed by a discussion of how the knowledge sharing requirement reflects the new regionalism movement. The approach of each of the example grantees is examined in terms of what activities they are employing, gaps in information needed to fulfill this aspect of the new HUD initiative and other specific issues important to their individual initiatives. Eight activity-based criteria are used to compare and evaluate the local programs. These criteria – committee/working group efforts, report/information accessibility and distribution, social media presence, interactive activities, speaker series, educational workshops and public participation – are applied not in terms of measuring success but rather as a means to illustrate what activities are being implemented in this new program and which define the local response to the national requirements. Further, the criteria help to identify underused activities within each organization that could potentially enrich their knowledge sharing efforts. It is also important to note that these less frequently used innovative approaches may not be appropriately represented within a grantee's individual efforts but still may carry important implications and lessons for future initiatives. While it is too early to determine the overall success each of the evaluated grantees will achieve in fulfilling the capacity building requirement, this evaluation does indicate which agencies are demonstrating a more concerted effort in this component. A summary matrix of the results of this analysis as well as project and lead agency contact information is also included.

INTRODUCTION

In 2010, the U. S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) initiated a new Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant (SCRPG) program as part of its involvement in the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities. This program, which is founded on six livability principles and five goals derived from HUD's Strategic Plan for FY2010-2015, seeks to better support effective community level planning across metropolitan regions through more coordinated federal policy of three agencies: HUD, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) and their encouragement of like action by the metropolitan areas where most Americans live. The goals of this partnership and the SCRPG program are based in part in the new regionalism movement that emerged in the 1990s and the aim "to coordinate federal housing, transportation, water, and other infrastructure investments to make neighborhoods more prosperous," (sustainablecommunities.gov, *Partnership for Sustainable Communities*). Among other responsibilities of these grants, grantees are obligated to meet a new a somewhat unique requirement to engage in capacity building and knowledge sharing in order to increase their respective organizations' skills and technical expertise as well as improve their ability to work together on a regional or metropolitan scale. This paper investigates the approaches that an illustrative sub-set of 2010 grantees are employing in order to meet this requirement. An additional purpose for this inquiry is based off of work currently being done on the same grant within the Muskie School of Public Service (in partnership with other organizations). Of particular interest is how Southern Maine's grant project, Sustain Southern Maine, can learn from other grantees' capacity building activities as they develop their own approaches. First, a brief overview of the SCRPG program will be discussed outlining the livability principles, strategic targets and overall ambitions for this initiative. Second, a basic introduction to the tenets of the new regionalism movement is presented as a context for understanding how capacity building and knowledge sharing may present an effective contribution to governance for achieving regional

coordination. Third, a summary of the capacity building and knowledge sharing tactics from ten of the 2010 grantees illustrates the varied approaches organizations are undertaking as well as revealing common trends in approaches. The methodology for choosing these representatives is also discussed. Observations are offered about the potential efficacy of each organization's approach based on formative agency experiences.

NEW REGIONALISM AND THE HUD PROGRAM

Historically, the idea of regionalism in planning began in the 1920's with two groups of similar but conceptually different schools of thought (Wheeler, 2002). The first group, including thinkers like Lewis Mumford and Patrick Geddes, interpreted regionalism in a holistic manner and took on an idealistic approach to the decentralization of cities. The second school of thought was promoted by professional groups and focused on the physical urban form and planning of cities (Wheeler, 2002; Friedman and Weaver, 1979). These two groups of thought, the regionalist and the metropolitanist planning perspectives respectively, are important to the story of regionalism despite both being ultimately unsuccessful. The regionalist approach helped to seed ideas that lead to the now familiar problems with urban sprawl and metropolitanist planning created the unfortunate circumstances of urban renewal and unsuccessful public housing programs (Wheeler, 2002).

Nearly a century later, urban sprawl and equity remain some of planning's most daunting, challenging and complicated problems. The emergence of the new regionalism movement with the convening of the Congress for New Urbanism (CNU) in 1993 shifted away from the historically normative approach to regionalism and instead attempted to create a coordinated planning process across large geographical areas (Wheeler, 2002). This was done not only by acknowledging equity as an important element of community vitality but to also shift focus away from the metropolitan centers to include suburbs and outer rim communities within the planning scope (Foster, 2001; Swanstrom, 1996; Wheeler, 2002).

New regionalism is composed of a series of familiar characteristics but aims to produce new outcomes. First, there is a definitive focus on specific areas and territories while taking into account the importance of physical design and infrastructure. This reflects on the original regional movement from the 1920's with its spatial centered and urban form planning focus. Second, the new regionalism movement attempts to directly address the growth problems and fragmentation of metropolitan regions that have been created by past ill-conceived planning practices such as urban sprawl and equity imbalances. Finally, there is a notable integration between planning specialties with land use, transportation, equity, environmental and other planning efforts collaboratively working together for a common vision (Wheeler, 2002).

The success of new regionalism efforts depends on the ability of professionals and leaders to not only establish a constituency of organizations, groups and communities in a collaborative and coordinated planning effort, but to also create the social capital and civic culture necessary to sustain regional development (Mason, 2008; Swanstrom, 1996; Wheeler, 2002). Communication between stakeholders, activists, professionals and other community members as well as the sharing of expertise between these groups is central to develop the capacity to understand and plan for complicated issues. In other words, successful new regionalism is characterized by the cooperative governance of stakeholders through consensus building and the ability of communities to responsibly plan around shared resources on a regional level (Pierce, 1993; Swanstrom, 1996; Wheeler, 2002). This governance involves strategic collaboration in the development of regional institutions, cultivation of cooperative trust across government and organizational borders and an explicitly determined socio-political environment that aligns with the overall regional goals. (Mason, 2008; Swantstrom, 1996; Wheeler, 2002). Portland, Oregon's growth management planning which places a boundary around the metropolitan area to restrict urban development into rural farmlands is one popular example of this successful cooperative governance (Wheeler, 2002). While new regionalism governance is not without

controversy, it has important implications in terms of improving the impact regional planning collaborations can have in producing tangible, more sustainable, development alternatives. One method of potentially fostering this cooperative governance is through capacity building and knowledge sharing among professionals, planning-relevant organizations and their leaders in order to optimize information within municipalities and expand technical expertise. This informed dialogue across both local government and organizational borders is directly related to the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement within the SCRPG program.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES REGIONAL PLANNING GRANT PROGRAM

As part of the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, HUD created the SCRPG program to promote and empower multijurisdictional coordination and planning efforts in order to address “the interdependent challenges of (1) economic competitiveness and revitalization; (2) social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity; (3) energy use and climate change; and (4) public health and environmental impact,” (portal.hud.gov, *Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants*). The grant program focused on creating partnerships between organizations, including non-traditional collaborations, in order to create regional planning efforts reflective of six livability principles (see Table 1) and five goals (see Table 2) derived from HUD’s most recent strategic plan.

Table 1. HUD Livability Principles

- 1) Provide more transportation choices.
- 2) Promote equitable, affordable housing.
- 3) Enhance economic competitiveness.
- 4) Support existing communities.
- 5) Coordinate policies and leverage investment.
- 6) Value communities and neighborhoods.

Table 2. HUD Strategic Goals

- 1) Strengthen the nation's housing market to bolster the economy and protect consumers.
- 2) Meet the need for quality, affordable rental homes.
- 3) Utilize housing as a platform for improving quality of life.
- 4) Build inclusive and sustainable communities free from discrimination.
- 5) Transform the way HUD does business.

Grantees are required to commit to, develop and demonstrate strategies that translate these principles and goals into activities that directly address significant regional issues and provide long-term direction for investment and development (portal.hud.gov, *Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants*). Additionally, grantees have demonstrated compliance with two HUD policy priorities as they apply to the SCRPG program one of which is a requirement for capacity building and knowledge sharing related to the regional aims of the program. This unique requirement makes applicants responsible for increasing the skills and technical expertise of the partner organizations and actively share knowledge among participants (Policy Link, *The Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Guide*, 2010).

STUDY METHODOLOGY

To create a formative understanding of the challenges of and early approaches to meeting this requirement, this analysis examines the current actions and staff assessments of efforts in ten 2010 (first award year) grantee regions in the second year of their programs. There are multiple challenges inherent in developing appropriate methods needed to foster dialogues and to create learning opportunities within each project region. First, fulfilling the regional capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement depends on the coordination and cooperation of numerous entities and experts in a wide variety of professions. Discussions and workshops on sensitive subjects such as housing affordability, equity and economic competitiveness lend this process vulnerable to a variety of conflicts

and complications. Second, this requirement, and the grant as a whole, involves gathering support for regional thinking that transcends individual local government and organizational boundaries. There is a tension between what is good for a regional sustainability partnership versus what will work for an individual jurisdiction or partnership constituency. Finally, simply fostering the support, attendance and cooperation of geographically dispersed and diverse professionals, agencies and organizations is a challenge.

A workable number of grantee agencies that represent a variety of metropolitan settings from among the first-year grantees were identified based on several criteria. First, geographic location and regional scope were taken into consideration in order to encompass inherent differences in how local and state governments are structured in different states. The selected grantees represent both municipal and county-based governance. More specifically, the group of selected grantees captures some of the variations in how the participating entities reflect different emphases on local governments, non-profit and private organizations as well as various combinations of these participants. Second, the amount of grant funding each agency received was considered an important aspect in encompassing the various levels of support that were available to different initiatives. While the particular amount of money each project received was not a central aspect to evaluating the response to the capacity building requirement, monetary resources still have important implications as to what level of activities regional planning efforts can undertake. Therefore, the selected study grantees represent a range of total grant award levels from \$225,000 to over \$4.5 million. Third, the selected study grantees must have demonstrated a considerable web presence. This criterion was used as a proxy measurement to determine if a project had sufficiently progressed through their planning efforts. In other words, a well developed web-site with resources indicated an agency had reached sufficient progress in their respective initiative that implied active capacity building and knowledge efforts. Finally, one lead staff member of each grantee lead agency had to be willing to serve as a contact to clarify initiatives and

provide grant documents that may not be available on the website. Due to the fact the majority of research took place using internet-based tools, it was important to have this contact available for any needed clarification about publicly posted project information purposes. Through this set of criteria, a group of ten grantees were chosen for this review and analysis.

Grantee activities were tracked through the use of websites, mailing lists and social media websites such as Twitter and Facebook. Efforts were then compared to each agency's original grant application as well as their HUD-approved and subsequently developed work plan. These documents were used as a gauge to measure how the grantees were performing, what their initial ideas were and how they may have changed over the course of their respective efforts. The analysis is based on connecting the new regionalism movement to the role each organization plays in expanding knowledge-sharing and capacity building across local government and organizational borders. The type, scale and diversity of the efforts were classified based on observed outputs and types of activities and programs, and separated into a series of broad categories: committee and working group efforts, report/information accessibility and distribution, social media presence, interactive activities, speaker series, educational workshops and public involvement. Each grantee received a grade from zero use to frequent use within each category describing their reliance on these activities as well as their level of success in demonstrating visible and accessible capacity building and knowledge sharing initiatives. These trends in project development to meet the requirements are compared and contrasted and implications for the Southern Maine grantee project, Sustain Southern Maine, are noted, as well as under-utilized and promising approaches among all grantees.

2010 GRANTEES: APPROACHES TO CAPACITY BUILDING & KNOWLEDGE SHARING

As part of the application process for the SCRPG program, groups had to identify themselves as one of two particular applicant categories. Category One applicants are those that intend to develop a twenty year horizon regional plan for sustainable development. Alternatively, Category Two applicants

were regions with existing plans that integrate the principles for regional sustainability and aim to develop a detailed plan for implementation. As indicated in each section, the first eight grantees discussed will be Category One applicants, while the last two will be Category Two. The focus on Category One applicants has two purposes: (1) to keep the information provided in the paper focused on agencies looking for innovative ideas rather than pre-established plans and (2) to act as a comparison to the Sustain Southern Maine project resulting from the Greater Portland Council of Governments being a 2010 Category One grantee of the SCRPG program. All information, descriptions and graphics in the following section are drawn from each program’s website unless otherwise indicated.

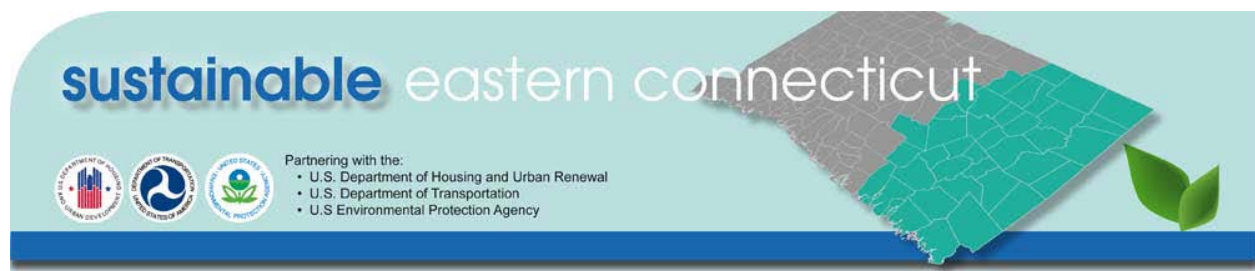


Figure 1. Sustainable Eastern Connecticut logo

Sustainable Eastern Connecticut – Windham Region Council of Governments, CT

www.sustaineasternct.org

Grant Amount: \$225,000

Category 1

The Sustainable Eastern Connecticut project is one of the two smallest grantees in terms of awarded funding out of the total forty-five agencies in the 2010 SCRPG program. The effort is being governed by the Eastern Connecticut Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Consortium – a partnership of three Connecticut councils of government, the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board and the Southeastern Connecticut Housing Alliance. This consortium represents 41 communities, two tribal nations, the three Regional Planning Organizations and a Workforce Investment Area that includes a total area of 1,250 square miles and a population of over 430,000 people. Sustainable Eastern Connecticut’s approach to capacity building and knowledge sharing begins with a regional visioning process and leads into an issues analysis which will advise the consortium as they

integrate data and information into a multi-faceted regional plan. The early part of the study involves 'listening sessions' and topical forums on the specific areas of workforce development, transportation and housing. The ultimate goal of these workshops is to establish a shared understanding of the region's issues and needs for the consortium and the consultant team who will be facilitating future capacity building activities.

There are four levels of analysis and knowledge sharing involved in Sustainable Eastern Connecticut's fulfillment of the capacity building requirement. First, general consortium meetings throughout the process will help develop and foster communication among the partners and their constituencies. Second, a review of sixty current plans from agencies dealing with a variety of issues including workforce development, transportation, housing, economic development, infrastructure and land use will be analyzed in order to identify gaps in data and information. Third, these gaps will be addressed through capacity building and knowledge sharing brainstorming activities as well as focus group meetings that will provide the necessary data to complete a regional profile. Finally, the materials resulting from these focus group meetings will be presented and discussed by the consortium and the general public in a series of visioning workshops to guide the development of the final regional plan document. All meeting agendas, summaries and presentations are to be posted on the website alongside other related documents including existing regional plans and general information.

In terms of fulfilling the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement, Sustainable Eastern Connecticut has taken a fairly linear approach in terms of focus groups, workshops and collaborative analysis. There does appear to be gaps in the information provided via their website and their associated Twitter account. For example, the latest documentation that has been provided online dates back several months. While this may accurately reflect the most recent activity, it seems to be inaccurate according to their timeline (see Table 3) which states ongoing consortium meetings and this information gap could be indicative of a breakdown in knowledge sharing initiatives.

Table 3. Project Timeline: September 2011 through December 2012

- Consortium Meetings – Ongoing
- Transportation – September 2011 – April 2012
- Workforce Development – September 2011 – April 2012
- Housing – September 2011 – June 2012
- Public Engagement – September 2011 – June 2012
- Plan Development – October 2011 – June 2012
- Visioning Sessions – May/June 2012
- Summary Meetings – October/November 2012

Source: <http://www.sustaineasternct.org/project-overview.html>



Figure 2. Rockford Region Vital Signs logo

Our Vital Signs – Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning, IL

www.ourvitalsigns.com

Grant Amount: \$600,000

Category 1

The consortium for Vital Signs is anchored by the Rockford (IL) Metropolitan Agency for Planning and the Rockford Region Economic Development District. This partnership incorporates an area of just over 800 square miles and a total population of nearly 350,000 people. The branding of this project is uniquely marketed towards the young adult population in its language, logo and strong multi-media presence on Twitter, Facebook and You Tube. Vital Signs describes their goal as creating a ‘playbook’ of tasks for all members of the region to accomplish in order to create a sustainable future for the communities. This project depends heavily on creating a culture and common language among the region in order to cultivate stakeholder ‘buy in’ to the overall effort.

In terms of capacity building and knowledge sharing, Vital Signs intends to ‘coach’ both official and unofficial community leaders to (1) see each other’s perspectives, (2) break down barriers and (3) bring new perspectives to the forefront. Vital Signs begins with an analysis of sixteen topic items demonstrating regional sustainability: safety, civic vitality, cultural life, health, food, housing, education, economic development, technology, transportation, built environment, water, land, biodiversity, energy and waste management. Using a health analogy (see Table 4), the project has established a series of teams which are responsible for sharing their expertise and knowledge on these topics and ‘diagnose’ the region. District Teams will identify and develop opportunities and strategies in accordance with the overall plan indicators on a neighborhood level. Topic Teams will develop goals, objectives, action items and indicators for one of the sixteen topics of sustainability. Finally, the Grassroots Action Team is responsible for on-the-ground dissemination of information and for inspiring local organizations to actively pursue sustainability initiatives.

Table 4. The Health Analogy

- 1) Take the pulse of the region.
- 2) Diagnose our community.
- 3) Plan for treatment of our area.
- 4) Grow the Rockford Region.

Source:

<http://www.ourvitalsigns.com/process.html>

The Vital Signs project is a unique effort for several reasons. First, it demonstrates a concerted effort to cultivate a cultural awareness and investment from the young adult population. As previously mentioned, this is evident in their language, logo and social media presence. However, this is also observed through their use of the popular web series, TED Talks (ted.com). In lieu of providing links to planning documents, Vital Signs opted to place applicable TED Talks and other short videos on their web site as a way to further appeal to this younger target group. Second, the Vital Signs project was one of the few grantees that received full funding by the SCRPG in that they received no budget reduction from

their initial application request. Finally, this project seems to have completely combined their knowledge sharing and capacity building requirement with public outreach in that involvement in any one of the three project teams is open to anyone in the region. While this last trend is observed in many of the other grantees in their approaches to expanding expertise, Vital Signs alone targets the young adult, 'next generation' population which is a distinct difference compared to their SCRPG program counterparts.



Figure 3. The Tomorrow Plan logo

The Tomorrow Plan – Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning Organization, IA

www.thetomorrowplan.com

Grant Amount: \$1,420,300

Category 1

Des Moines' Tomorrow Plan encompasses seventeen cities, four counties and over half a million people. This plan's primary goals in expanding their technical expertise are to foster new relationships while leveraging existing ones. The Tomorrow Plan focuses on providing a forum for collaborative stakeholder participation in the regional planning process by elevating sustainability discussions and the strategic choices the area is faced with by prioritizing and incorporating these topic discussions into regular dialogues. Des Moines' has also made a concerted effort in encouraging a 'systems thinking' approach by emphasizing not only how all the facets of the project work together but also by actively trying to demonstrate how the general public and professionals are responsible for the success of regional planning. There are three teams within the Tomorrow Plan's consortium: (1) a steering committee co-chaired by the mayor and the county supervisor including membership of twenty-four participants that represent regional cities, counties and applicable organizations, (2) three transportation planners and the executive director of the Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning

Organization (DMAMPO) and (3) an expansive consulting team made up of seven different organizations and agencies.

The Tomorrow Plan is undertaking several initiatives to fulfill the capacity sharing and knowledge sharing requirement. Similar to other SCRPG program grantees, there is a strong social media presence including a Twitter account and a Facebook account. Des Moines has also placed activities, discussion forums and an impressive amount of information directly on the project's website. For example, the "Star Network" game (see Figure 4) encourages visitors to the site to indicate their home, where they shop, where they work and other important locations on a map of the region. These points are then connected to form a unique, personalized star illustrating how and where people are interacting within the regional environment. The information gathered by this activity helps to inform The Tomorrow Plan teams on how the population utilizes the entire region and its components. An online discussion forum, called the Tomorrow Exchange, involves weekly experts within a certain field to serve as guest authors and introduce a train of thought related to sustainable regionalism. The community and other stakeholders are then invited to discuss and share ideas regarding the particular subject and creating ongoing dialogue on the project.

Des Moines has also pursued more traditional forms of knowledge sharing such as a speaker series, educational forums and regular consortium meetings. Further, a resource library on the site offers a full listing of reports and presentations from the Tomorrow Plan's efforts to date. Similar to other projects there is also a concerted effort to establish a shared vocabulary around the built environment, natural environment, economic revitalization, social equity and energy and waste. Stressing how these facets interact and how to formally address their interconnectedness within the regional planning efforts continues to be a central theme throughout these more traditional methods.

Des Moines combines the typical routes to expand expertise with a unique approach to the capacity building component. Their initiatives have the additional strength of incorporating active public

outreach and easily accessible activities into their efforts. In this way, the Tomorrow Plan illustrates an example of innovative methods to creatively expand regional knowledge.

This interactive game asks you to look at your regional network.

- 1 Guesstimate where your home or neighborhood is on the map.
- 2 Locate a few places that mean something to you, like your favorite grocery store, where your best friend lives, or where you bought your car.
- 3 Connect the dots between your home and your places. You can see your family's "star" network of how you live, work, and play in the Greater Des Moines region. At the end, you can see what your "regional star" looks like compared with others in the Greater Des Moines community.

ACTIVITY

Figure 4. The "Star Network" activity



Figure 5. Sustainable Thurston logo

Sustainable Thurston – Thurston Regional Planning Council, WA

www.trpc.org

Grant Amount: \$1,500,000

Category 1

Sustainable Thurston represents a diverse assortment of partners in a regional collaboration to understand and make connections between economic, social and environmental issues. There are twenty-nine partners representing local governmental jurisdictions, state agencies, organizations and community groups that make up the project’s task force. Informed by a series of expert panels charged with developing recommendations and background information to identify challenges, opportunities and linkages between regional issues, the task force is also responsible for creating a dialogue with the public regarding the project’s overall ambitions. Sustainable Thurston focuses on ten areas of regional development (see Figure 6). Additionally, given an anticipated increase in population of 170,000 people over the next thirty years, this project has begun at a pivotal time in order for the region to determine and accommodate what responsible, sustainable growth and development will look like.



Figure 6. Sustainable Thurston’s ten areas of regional development

The primary capacity building and knowledge sharing activity for Sustainable Thurston is a series of expert panels on each of the ten focus areas and subsequent drafting of white papers that demonstrate the opportunities, challenges and connections each of the components have to each other. Over three dozen discussion sessions with experts highlighting regional implications guide the creation of the twelve topic specific white papers (with school siting being broken into North and South County documents). The intention of the sessions and resulting papers is to provide a comprehensive base of information that will be used by the task force to enrich a three-phase public participation process. These capacity building and knowledge sharing initiatives will have the additional value of informing stakeholders of how to address pivotal connections between topics as they continue to progress towards a sustainable regional plan.

In addition to the expert panels, Sustainable Thurston has a distinctive process in fulfilling the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement that is linked to public outreach. While participation in the panels and discussion boards has been extensive, Sustainable Thurston provides materials – in electronic or hard copy form – for people to hold their own meetings and report their findings. This Meeting in a Box, is being provided in order to extend the reach of the project to include as many people as possible. The activity includes instructions, a background presentation, summaries of the white papers, group questions and info-graphics highlighting regional growth and development. While this unique approach does focus primarily on public outreach, there is an important element of knowledge building in that experts and professionals who may not be directly involved have the opportunity to learn about the current status of the area and share their own expertise.

Sustainable Thurston has taken a primarily linear route towards building capacity and sharing knowledge. That being said, their Meeting in a Box has the potential to create further dialogue with experts and stakeholders they may have otherwise been unaware of. While there is not a timeline provided, this project is actively holding public meetings and workshops in order to discuss and address

the issues outlined by the expert authored white papers and to begin to incorporate the concerns and desires of the general population.



Figure 7. GrowNC logo

GrowNC – Land-of-Sky Regional Council, NC

www.gro-wnc.org

Grant Amount: \$1,600,000

Category 1

The GrowNC project team is composed of members of the Land-of-Sky Regional Council and a consultant team. Further, a consortium that includes residents, organizations, research agencies, governing bodies and community groups represent the five counties of Buncombe, Haywood, Henderson, Madison and Transylvania that make up this region in North Carolina. The consortium is led by a thirteen member steering team issued with prioritizing activities, approving the public process and making overall recommendations to streamline the project. The steering team in turn includes members from each of the work groups who are focusing on six distinct topics - economic development, energy, health, housing, land use, natural & cultural resources and transportation. GrowNC's capacity building and knowledge sharing efforts focus on weaving together existing plans and gathering data according to a local livability framework (see Figure 8).

The work groups for each of the framework topics, which are based on the livability principles as outlined in the SCRPG program, meet and discuss the challenges and opportunities each component faces. Further, these groups are responsible for the review of current plans and strategies and the integration of public input into their findings. The focus area reviews, presentations, agenda packets as well as photos documenting these events are posted on the website for easy access by the public,



Figure 8. GrowNC's livability framework

professionals and other stakeholders. These groups are self-selected by involved stakeholders based on their respective expertise and interests and operate as GrowNC's primary method in producing cross-cutting knowledge for analysis and future collaboration between groups. The process of establishing a baseline of information involves three rounds of work with the GrowNC project team. First, the work groups synthesize information presented by the project team to identify issues and opportunities. Second, working sessions attempt to generate ideas and alternative solutions based on public feedback gathered at a large meeting called a Reality Check. Third, work groups will start to frame the policies and implementation plans for the overall project. By involving consortium members at all levels of this project's governance (consortium, steering committee and working groups) GrowNC is effectively trying to maximize the interaction and opportunities stakeholders will have to learn from each other.

Interestingly, GrowNC has had a major issue in maintaining support from one of the involved counties. Henderson County has opted to withdraw from the process for the time being. This was in response to the county's representative reporting that the project was "rigged, despicable and costly," (Glancy, 2012). The representative felt the work groups who were meant to inform the steering committee on important issues were instead "extreme environmentalists" and that the program is "designed to give certain groups a platform to push their social agenda on participating counties," (Glancy, 2012). Further, it was felt that there was a lack of appropriate representation for Henderson

country. It is unknown if this area will choose to rejoin the GrowNC project. Currently, they are waiting for a list of actionable items from the steering committee that will determine if this regional effort fits within the county's needs.

Despite this setback, the GrowNC initiative seems to be making headway in its capacity building and knowledge sharing activities. Regular meetings for the workgroups continue to be held with notes and progress being posted on the website. Draft goals and objectives based off of these meetings are being drafted and the first Reality Check benchmark meeting is on schedule.



Figure 9. GrowNC logo

Plan for Opportunity – Gulf Regional Planning Commission, MS

www.gulfcoastplan.org

Grant Amount: \$2,000,000

Category 1

The Gulf Coast region's Plan for Opportunity represents three coastal counties, eleven coast municipalities and nine partnership organizations along the Gulf coast of Mississippi (see Figure 10). The goal of their effort is to coordinate investments, restructure funding programs and align policies across the region to support socio-spatial responsible housing and transportation goals through the reinforcement of existing assets and attracting new businesses. The region's Plan for Opportunity

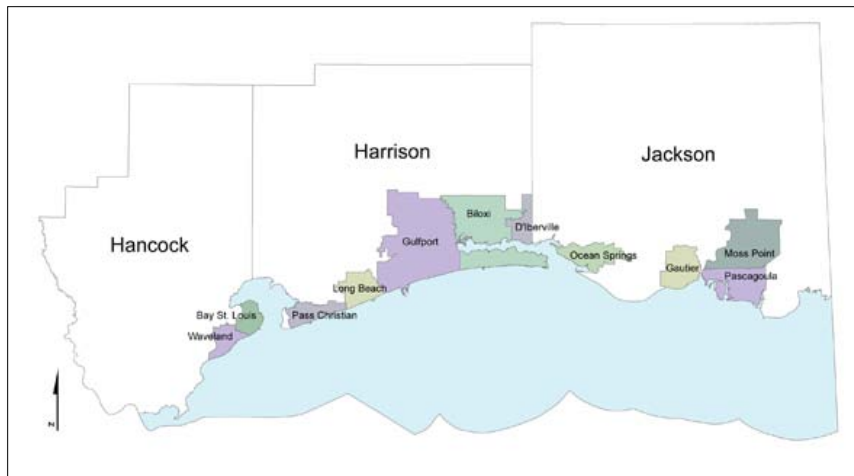


Figure 10. Plan for Opportunity region

focuses its capacity building and knowledge sharing activities on establishing working relationships between planning agencies so they function as partners at the regional level and to help stakeholders become familiar with sustainable development concepts. Eight designated 'Planning Elements' create the subject areas for the project's research, planning and outreach efforts: land use, housing, transportation, infrastructure, economic development, water quality, air quality and food systems.

The Plan for Opportunity's capacity building activities involves several committees, subcommittees and working groups. Subcommittees representing each of the Planning Elements are composed of members of the sustainability working group, which will be described shortly, and are responsible for the research, preparation of and reporting of the information on each topic. Further, the information they gather is meant to guide on-going discussions and provide recommendations during the Plan for Opportunity process. However, this direct method of expanding technical expertise filters through several other groups. As the decision making body, the executive committee includes eight members from the Gulf Region Planning Commission and seven public stakeholders with regional interest. This committee is responsible for approving objectives, addressing conflicts and maintaining streamlined progress of the project. The aforementioned Sustainability Working Group includes forty-five city and county planning staff and other key members of the region. This team of representatives provides the executive committee with various recommendations during the planning process including objectives, implementation strategies and deliverables. As previously mentioned, these participants also serve as members on the Planning Element subcommittees. The Regional Governments Committee is responsible for maintaining open communication with the fourteen represented local jurisdictions within the Plan for Opportunity region. One top official from each Mississippi county and municipality is included in order to maintain local involvement and approval of the regional planning process. Finally the Project Management Committee, composed of one representative from each of the ten partnership organizations, is responsible for research and outreach efforts for the plan over the course of the Plan

for Opportunity project. Therefore, information and progress completed by any of these committees and groups in turn works to inform another team. In this way, there is an organic collaboration and sharing of knowledge in order to develop further expertise in the Planning Element topics.

Additional means to building capacity can be observed in the Plan for Opportunity's comprehensive list of reports and publications with regards to progress, news articles and an eventual interactive regional map room. While the Gulf Coast seems to employ a typical approach to meeting the knowledge sharing requirement, their innovative governance structure allows for open distribution of regional information. In this way they seem to be capitalizing on the collection and analysis of available information and continue to hold regular meetings in order to maintain project momentum.



Figure 11. PlanET logo

PlanET – City of Knoxville, TN

www.planeasttn.org

Grant Amount: \$4,327,500

Category 1

The PlanET consortium is composed of five counties, sixteen cities, four towns and a community of regional partners in joint collaboration. This project has a unique leadership structure in that their efforts are guided by a board of mayors with representation from each county and municipality within the region (see Figure 12). They are responsible for guiding progress, providing political backing for planning and approving project targets as they are reached. Further, the board of mayors will eventually be forming an executive committee to provide stronger political oversight, encourage other political leaders to become involved, build regional political capacity and engage community leaders in the PlanET process. This differs from most of the other SCRPG grantees where projects are overseen by

an MPO or other planning organization and political leaders serve strictly as members of the consortium or working groups.

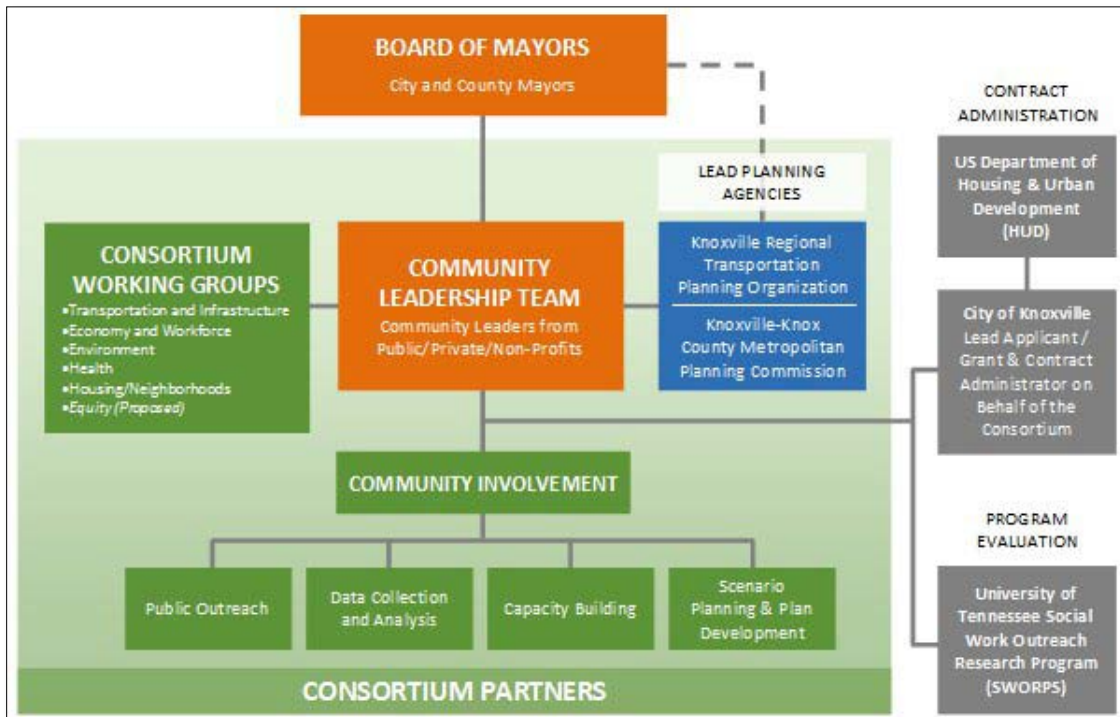


Figure 12. PlanET logo

The PlanET project aims to have continuous and ongoing capacity building and knowledge sharing activities during their three phase process. The effort’s project team is composed of consultants as well as staff within the existing partnership in order to provide and share expertise. Further, a community leadership team consisting of public, private and non-profit organizations is responsible for engaging and informing constituencies as well as providing leveraged resources and technical knowledge to enrich the development of the regional plan. With five areas of focus - transportation, housing, economic development/jobs, environment and community health - the PlanET project aims to engage, educate and develop a shared direction to understand future trends, develop alternative future scenarios and create a responsible regional growth framework.

PlanET relies heavily on community involvement as a means to capacity building and knowledge sharing. Public forums framed by technical components aid in collecting, organizing and prioritizing

project ideas. Photos and videos of these forums as well as activities and reports on common themes are all easily accessible via the website. After each of the public forums, working groups of citizens with specialized knowledge or interest unravel and research the deeper issues that arise. Similar to other grantees, PlanET has a strong social media presence. This project also lists an impressive amount of public events as well as documentation outlining the state of the region, existing conditions reports and a data clearinghouse. Other site activities include analyzing and sharing top regional priorities, an interactive map room with population and demographic data and Meetings in a Box which provide materials and instructions on hosting ‘public forums’ on a smaller scale. Results from these more personalized meetings are collected and integrated with the larger PlanET facilitated workshops in order to guide the working groups’ efforts to progress the overall project.

PlanET employs a creative and highly interactive method of fulfilling the capacity building requirement. Extensive use of their web platform supports this project’s easily accessible educational and knowledge sharing initiative.



Figure 13. St. Louis Regional Sustainable Communities logo

St. Louis Regional Sustainable Communities – East-West Gateway Council of Governments, MI

www.ewgateway.org/rpsd/

Grant Amount: \$4,687,750

Category 1

St. Louis’s Regional Plan for Sustainable Development (RPSD) involves a consortium of eleven partners financially committed to the process and responsible for providing action oriented deliverables. Supporting the consortium are four acting committees. The steering committee guides the development of the plan through recommendations, defining the plan’s meaning of sustainability and livability, and sets project goals. Further, the steering committee oversees the work being done by the

three standing committees. Over one hundred collaborative members of these committees are tasked with completing work and activities within three important areas of the RPSD work plan: technical planning, public engagement and outcome management.

Most of the work done to fulfill the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement is being completed by the Technical Planning standing committee. This group is responsible for research and data management. Further, their expertise is used to inform the Public Engagement standing committee to coordinate the distribution of information to the general public. Within the technical planning committee there are several sub-groups representing a number of regional and plan-based issues including housing, transit-oriented development and environmental best practices. Guest speakers aid these groups in identifying the opportunities, challenges and alternative solutions within each topic area. The information gathered within these meetings is then used to elaborate on trends and support the distribution of cross cutting knowledge on these processes.

The primary deliverable on this work will be the creation of a web portal which will provide access to three planning support tools. First, to foster community building and place-making initiatives consistent with the region, the portal will include an online planning guide designed to support knowledge sharing and inform users on best practices through visualization tools illustrating responsible sustainable development and approaches to conservation. Second, the portal will house a data warehouse and performance tracking archive in order to support the creation and sharing of regional information and provide performance measures from which to gauge process. Finally, collaborative planning in the development and implementation of the RPSD will be supported by an online planning environment. This will permit the various committees to easily share and access each other's data, maps, outcomes, tools and other materials in order to facilitate an open and dynamic work environment.

In addition to these activities, the public engagement committee is also contributing to the RPSD's capacity building efforts through the coordination of a large regional cross sector plan to raise awareness and increase participation within the plan. Conferences, webinars, symposia and existing training programs will be facilitated through the lead agency in order build technical expertise. Further, the East-West Gateway Council of Governments plans to piggy-back their capacity building efforts with existing outlets including professional development workshops, local universities, training institutions and other planning organizations working towards the creation of livable communities. As these efforts progress, reports, summaries and other materials generated from the activities are being posted on the project's websites to be used as resources between participating stakeholders as well as for the public's general consumption. Tools, handbooks, plans and other summaries are also being made available in order to further cultivate the knowledge sharing and capacity building requirement and maximize the audience for RPSD project.



Figure 14. ECOS logo

ECOS - Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, VT

www.ecosproject.com

Grant Amount: \$995,000

Category 2

The ECOS project, standing for environment, community, opportunity and sustainability, represents a cooperative agreement between the nineteen municipalities in Chittenden County and over forty non-profit, institutional and governmental agencies and organizations. As a Category Two grantee, the project builds off of previously existing planning work as it identifies and implements strategies to improve the region's long-term sustainability in terms of costs of transportation, land use, energy, housing, economic development, public health, education and natural resources. Divided into seven tasks and spanning five phases, ECOS is led by a steering committee to guide activities and a

coordination group made up of local organizations to offer technical assistance and expertise on different aspects of the project.

<p><u>Table 5. ECOS Timeline</u></p> <p>Phase 1: Project Goals – May-September 2011 Phase 2: Analysis – October-December 2011 Phase 3: Indicators – January-April 2012 Phase 4: Implementation and Priorities – April-October 2012 Phase 5: Implementation Actions – October-December 2012</p> <p><i>Source:</i> http://www.ecosproject.com/participate</p>

Of the entire ECOS project, the analysis phase involved the most notable display of capacity building and knowledge sharing activities. During this phase, which took place from October 2011 through December 2011 (see Table 5), the main target was to create a common understanding in the community on regional economic development, housing, energy, land use and transportation, natural resources, public health and education. The steering committee was and remains the primary vehicle for capacity building and knowledge sharing. Assessments of issues affecting the region resulted in analytical reports in order to promote a common understanding of opportunities and challenges the area faces. Drafts of these reports were housed on the project’s website and not only provided easy access for those involved but also offered the public an opportunity to comment on and discuss the trends on each topic. The resulting final reports, which are also available on the website, have since been used to begin to develop the plan’s indicators or measurements of effectiveness as a means to gauge the region’s success in aligning with the final plan’s sustainable development goals. Such measures of effectiveness are a common feature of these RPSD projects under HUD’s expectations. Subcommittees have also been formed to help review and finalize projects within each of the project’s focus areas. While these are open to the public, they are headed by involved stakeholders with direct knowledge of or a particular interest in the topic area. ECOS also is hosting a speaker series on pertinent planning issues in order to further develop a baseline of information to act as the foundation for

sustainable regional development. Documents and other materials from each speaker series are posted on the website along with steering and subcommittee meeting notes and other project deliverables.

As mentioned, the ECOS project is a Category Two grantee in the SCRPG program. Therefore, the majority of their capacity building and knowledge sharing work reflects the need to create a common understanding among the involved municipalities so that each may update their respective comprehensive plans to align with the project's overall goal and vision, which are aimed at implementation. While ECOS does a suitable job of creating opportunities to share expertise across their focus areas and between stakeholders, due to the fact this effort is not starting from scratch there are little observable activities aside from participation in the meetings and allowing comments and dialogue on associated report drafts. That being said, it appears that this project will in the future be opening up roundtable discussions as well as conducting site visits and field events in order to create a more interactive knowledge sharing process.



Figure 15. Capital Region Sustainable Communities logo

Capital Region Sustainable Communities – Capital Area Regional Planning Commission, WI

www.capitalregionscrpg.org

Grant Amount: \$1,997,500

Category 2

The twenty-seven member partnership making up the Capital Regional Sustainable Communities (CRSC) consortium includes regional, municipal and state level agencies as well as several private partners representing business, environmental, housing and social initiatives. Outlining a number of regional goals for this area, the first phase of this project's primary focus was learning and capacity

building in order to share knowledge for informed decision making and streamline collaboration. Through regular consortium meetings, dialogue among stakeholders, subcommittee formation and internet based information sharing, this project aims to increase the capacity among all partnership members. Additionally, CRSC intends to establish a common knowledge base for its constituencies and apply determined performance indicators to ongoing activities.

Several methods are being employed by this project in order to increase the technical expertise within the partnership. First, ongoing meetings, informational sessions and several conferences aim to share information regarding best practices, lessons, challenges and opportunities among the consortium members. A report based on these trends will also be provided online and included in web-based e-mail and newsletter distributions to the public. Second, scheduled site visits will serve as an example as to how other regions are creating walkable, transit-friendly urban development. Not only will this provide additional opportunities to discuss important issues affecting the region, but these site visits represent a more interactive means to capacity building. Third, a thorough inventory and analysis of existing initiatives and activities will be conducted in order to promote sustainability and regional collaboration. These environmental condition reports will inform a series of reports in order to illustrate the region's current conditions. Additionally, the information that is gathered will operate as the basis and foundation from which working groups will begin to determine plans and alternatives to be included in the final regional sustainable development document. Finally, six sustainability activities constitute the plan's make-up in terms of actionable outcomes (see Table 6). These activities directly link to how the CRSC project is attempting to maximize its capacity building and knowledge sharing potential.

The CRSC project, similar to other grantees, also houses all meeting notes, agendas and activity information on their website. Further, they provide a current status report on what has been completed, and what work is forthcoming in the project. In this way, all participants have a clear understanding of the progress the project is making while generating a sense of 'ownership' towards

activities that have been delayed or unsuccessful. While the CRSC does not have any particularly creative approaches to fulfilling the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement, they succeed in the detailed amount of information they have been able to generate and distribute to the region's stakeholders and general public.

Table 6. Sustainability Activities

- 1) Develop a broad partnership to advance regional sustainable development.
- 2) Prepare plans for enhanced transit and transit-oriented development.
- 3) Prepare Future Urban Development Area (FUDA) plans for sustainable urban growth.
- 4) Close gaps in local/regional plans for inclusive participation, housing and air quality.
- 5) Demonstrate sustainable development through catalytic activities.
- 6) Establish sustainability indicators and track progress towards long-term desired outcomes.

Source: <http://www.capitalregionscrpg.org/About.html>

ASSESSING THE APPROACHES: ANALYSIS

The analysis of the subset of 2010 grantees shows significant similarities among the studied agencies' approaches to capacity building and knowledge sharing. As discussed earlier, successful new regionalism is characterized by the cooperative governance of stakeholders through consensus building and the ability of communities to responsibly plan around shared resources at a regional level (Pierce, 1993; Swanstrom, 2008; Wheeler, 2002). While increasing technical expertise is a separate issue than public involvement in terms of requirements within the SCRPG program, there seems to be a common acknowledgement among the studied grantees that large scale participation by community members and professionals alike is central to the success of building a complete knowledge base. This can be observed in the majority of the studied agencies and how, in many ways, their capacity building initiatives overlap with community outreach and public participation efforts.

Similarly, a second commonality among the studied grantees is the use of having a strong web-based presence to not only present project materials but also to maintain public and professional momentum by sharing information, events and other opportunities to create an incentive to stay involved in each respective project. Nearly all of the different projects' websites serve multiple purposes including knowledge sharing, public outreach, access to a data commons and other interactive opportunities. This works to enhance the visibility of each project in order to establish a constituency of organizations, groups and communities in a collaborative and coordinated planning effort. Further this fosters social capital and the civic culture necessary to sustain regional development that is reflective of the SCRPG program's new regionalist framework (Mason, 2008; Swanstrom, 2006; Wheeler, 2002).

However, there are also some considerable differences among agency approaches to capacity building and knowledge sharing. These distinctions include the degree to which multiple methods are used in their approaches, variations in the overall attention paid to the capacity building requirement and varying levels of methodological creativity. While it is difficult to determine each project's particular level of overall success considering that these efforts are on-going, there are several trends worth noting that make some initiatives distinctive in their knowledge sharing tactics.

Table 7. Approaches to Capacity Building and Knowledge Sharing

- 1) Committee/Working Group Efforts
- 2) Report/Information Accessibility & Distribution
- 3) Social Media Presence
- 4) Interactive Activities
- 5) Speaker Series
- 6) Educational Workshops
- 7) Site Visits
- 8) Public Involvement

This analysis focuses on eight categories of identified approaches that reflect the new regionalism movement and overall goals of the SCRPG program (see Table 7). By highlighting the strengths of various methods and basic differences between these grantees' approaches, current and

future regional planning initiatives under HUD's initiative can learn from emerging efforts. Each of these eight categories is defined, briefly discussed and illustrated in a matrix (see Figure 16) in order to further demonstrate the diversity of methods that are available and being used by the grantees. It should be further noted that all of the studied grantees are works in progress. Therefore it is likely the grade that is illustrated for each category for each respective project will change over time as the grantees progress through their initiatives.

1) Committee/Working Group Efforts

This category includes both the existence of working groups and committees to help guide project process as well as the frequency of their meetings to function as a determinant on whether consistent dialogue between partnership organizations and stakeholders is taking place. All of the agencies researched used some set of a working group, steering team or subcommittee structure to carry out research and provide background information on the current status of each particular region. There were some distinct differences in the governance structure which appears to affect the group composition as well as the activities each of these kinds of working teams carries out in the different projects. However, the recurrent trend among the studied grantees was that the formation of sub-groups was a popular vehicle for capacity building and knowledge sharing research. In particular, coordinated committees are responsible for establishing a foundation of knowledge on a singular topic such as regional land use or equity that is unique to each project region. Additionally, working groups then have to share or disseminate their findings in some way which varies slightly across the studied grantees but typically is web-based. Two of the grantees have only moderate working group collaboration while the rest of the agencies have higher dependence on these teams. This high level of reliance should not come as a surprise given the amount of information each agency needs to cull through and effectively disseminate to stakeholders. The two moderately scored agencies, Sustainable

Eastern Connecticut and PlanET, both had functioning work groups however they did not appear to be as involved or visibly active compared to the other organizations' efforts.

2) Report/Information Accessibility and Distribution

This category captures the ease with which involved partners and stakeholders are able to access reports and materials resulting from committee and working group efforts including white papers, research studies and regional data. Further, it addresses whether there is a distribution method from which updates and information can automatically be disseminated. Properly being able to share and report the information collected by the working groups and committees is vital to the success of capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement. Again, the majority of the agencies show a clear effort to post information online as well as to provide current news updates and progress documents to demonstrate what has been accomplished. Out of the grantees studied, two have a distinctively weaker approach to providing access to such information which could have serious implications for their capacity to share knowledge and expand expertise. Sustainable Eastern Connecticut, while mentioned in their work plan that meeting notes, agendas and presentations would be posted online seem to have gaps in their information with only a few incomplete materials currently available. This could reflect their aforementioned lower dependence on working group structures or responsibilities or it could just be a lag in their capacity to collect and appropriately distribute information given their smaller size. Our Vital Signs also has a weaker approach to sharing materials with the majority of resource documents being TedTalk videos (www.ted.com). While this information is still useful, it does little to inform the public and stakeholders as to region and project specific information creating a serious gap in the data accessibility of the Our Vital Signs project. Further, in their efforts to target the young adult population, they could be doing themselves a disservice by not providing more of their professionally generated reports in order to entice other experts in different areas to become involved in the project.

3) Social Media Presence

This category addresses the demonstrated extent of using social media outlets such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube in order to disseminate information and broadcast events to community stakeholders and involved partner organizations. While social media is primarily associated with public outreach, agencies are also using Facebook and Twitter to distribute important information regarding their project's knowledge sharing efforts. These social media platforms are used as a vehicle to share initiative events, news, reports, presentations, pictures and video segments to a broader audience that may not be captured with a simple website. Only two organizations did not use any form of social media – St. Louis Regional Sustainable Communities and the Capital Regional Sustainable Communities program.

Of the agencies actively using some form of social media, the level of use varies considerably in terms of how many platforms are used, how often each organization updates their materials and how much project specific material is actually disseminated through these web-based vehicles. The successful creation of subscriber-based electronic networks aids in the promotion of knowledge sharing by establishing a broader reach for a project, improving attendance and therefore input for assorted meetings and marketing a more visible and accessible project brand. Further, social media can be used to share professional and project-based research and link a project's developing knowledge base with a wider audience. Therefore, while social media use is not a necessity for capacity building and knowledge sharing it does provide an alternative method of fostering professional and community support which can enrich the process for expanding technical expertise.

4) Interactive Activities

This category captures any additional interactive activities such as games, discussion threads, networks, map rooms, 'Meetings in a Box' and other creative measures agencies are implementing in order to broaden the shared knowledge base. There are a range of interactive activities in use by the

examined grantees that aim to creatively share knowledge about their specific regions. Several organizations set up or were in the process of creating interactive map rooms which would house demographic and population information, land use and zoning ordinances and recreation sites among other items. Another popular feature among the organizations using an interactive method was providing documents, materials and instructions for visitors to the site to coordinate their own 'public meetings' in order to further inform the project's efforts. While only one agency, PlanET, scored the highest level of use of such activities, the integration of interactive games and other interfaces seems to be an underused tool that could be valuable to further the breadth of information shared among constituencies. The Tomorrow Plan's "Star Network" game is a perfect example of a fun, collaborative activity that not only allows the user to learn how people 'live regionally' but it also provides the partnership and consortium members with important information on where people are living and how they are interacting within the region, thus both creating and sharing knowledge at the same time.

5) Speaker Series

This category includes any speakers, lectures or other 'listening sessions' the agencies are using in order to expand their technical expertise and share professional knowledge on pertinent topics. The use of professional lectures and technical speakers is a popular method to build capacity and share knowledge across all of the studied organizations. This method has consistently moderate use among six out of the ten grantees included in this paper – with the remaining four split between frequent and minimal use. Of the two agencies that relied the least on this approach both GrowNC and Plan for Opportunity have a particularly insular governance structure. Both of these organizations have a governance structures where any given committee or work group is composed of members from another team of individuals working on the project. In this way, information that is collected on one topic is easily shared with any number of other groups. While this has created some problems in terms of municipality representation for GrowNC, Plan for Opportunity has been fairly successful in their

approach. In this way, these two organizations have seemed to replace an externally based speaker series with internal bootstrapping of topical information from their own internal memberships of professionals and experts.

6) Educational Workshops

This category includes workshops, conferences, retreats and other events where there is a high level of interaction among participants, professionals and members of the partnership. Much like the working groups, interactive learning events appear to be often used by all the studied organizations as a means to build capacity and share knowledge. The majority of organizations use these events in conjunction with their working group meetings as a means to develop a baseline of knowledge and information. For example, Sustainable Thurston's primary approach to capacity building and knowledge sharing is a series of expert panels which then produce white papers on project specific topics for internal and external distribution. This is meant to establish a common ground within the partnership members. Other agencies use retreats and conferences early in the process in order to create early dialogue among constituencies and make connections with potential stakeholders. At the beginning of their process, St. Louis Regional Sustainable Communities held topical training sessions for the partnership members in order to facilitate discussions on regional issues and establish membership familiarity. Regardless, all of the agencies have moderate to high use of various forms of educational workshops in their efforts to fulfill the capacity building requirement.

7) Site Visits

This category involves on the ground site visits to areas demonstrating effective regional development as a means for members of the partnership to personally interact with and witness the benefits and implications of sustainable planning. Out of all the criteria, the use of site visits as a means to share knowledge and build capacity was the most underused tool. Only the two Category Two applicants – ECOS and Capital Region Sustainable Communities – actively employ on-site visitations.

Agency	Working Groups	Reporting	Social Media	Games or Activities	Speakers	Workshops	Site Visits	Public Involvement
<i>Sustainable Eastern Connecticut</i> www.sustaineasternct.org								
<i>Our Vital Signs</i> www.ourvitalsigns.com								
<i>The Tomorrow Plan</i> www.thetomorrowplan.com								
<i>Sustainable Thurston</i> www.trpc.org								
<i>GrowNC</i> www.gro-wnc.org								
<i>Plan for Opportunity</i> www.gulfcoastplan.org								
<i>PlanET</i> www.planeasttn.org								
<i>St. Louis Regional Sustainable Communities</i> www.ewgateway.org/rpsd/								
<i>ECOS</i> www.ecosproject.com								
<i>Capital Region Sustainable Communities</i> www.capitalregionscrpg.org								

Key
= N/A, Zero Use
= Weak, Minimal Use
= Moderate, Often Use
= Strong, Frequent Use

Figure 16. Capacity Building Activity Criteria Matrix

This could be due to the fact that Category Two grantees are meant to build off of existing plans and therefore may be looking for examples from which to compare their own progress. However, site visits have the potential to provide insight to regionally define sustainability, livability and what ‘walkable cities’ look like. While examples of sustainable development on a regional scale may be difficult for organizations to personally visit, small scale efforts can still demonstrate how collaborative efforts produce stronger developments that benefit and prolong communities. Further, these visits have the potential to cultivate excitement, spur dialogue and create momentum within the collaborating organizations to continue their respective efforts.

8) Public Involvement

This category is meant to account for the connection that capacity building and knowledge sharing has with public involvement and the importance of including community members as an integral part of building a regional knowledge community. During the review of each grantee’s efforts, the line between public involvement and efforts to fulfill the capacity building requirement was often fuzzy although they are distinct and different requirements within the SCRPG program. Many of the other criterion activities and methods discussed here are also open to the public in order to foster community participation. It is not a surprise that all of the studied organizations use a fair amount of public involvement as a method to inform each respective project’s consortium on the issues directly affecting the community. While public participation certainly speaks to the strength and knowledge of the community these projects are planning for, it is equally important for partnerships to develop a foundation of data based on their own expertise. In this way, the project can maintain a balance between the wants of the community and what kind of sustainable development is feasibly and responsibly possible for the region given its natural constraints. Thus one of the tests of whether and how the innovative knowledge sharing and capacity building requirements of the RPSD grant program is

being met by grantees is the creation of efforts that tap expertise and share it among key partners as well as informing, consulting with and learning from the general public.

ASSESSING THE APPROACHES: SUSTAIN SOUTHERN MAINE

In terms of how Sustain Southern Maine's activities compare with the studied grantees there are definite implications for ways this project can improve their capacity building and knowledge sharing efforts. It should be noted that Sustain Southern Maine is not as far along in the process as the studied projects however, one of the biggest challenges this effort has faced is implementing a substantial web presence. Simply having a website at the onset of the initiative with basic information would have helped to create early dialogue among the consortium as well as foster new partnerships with other organizations. While an interim website was created in October of 2011, the efficacy of Sustain Southern Maine's capacity sharing initiatives has been significantly stunted due to a lack of sufficient web presence. That being said, with the creation of a brand and a substantial Sustain Southern Maine website, this project will have the opportunity to begin to pursue more creative methods of capacity building and knowledge sharing among its constituencies.

The current approaches Sustain Southern Maine is taking in regards to expanding expertise have been primarily speaker panels on various topics and subsequent dialogues between professionals and attendees following each presentation. While this method certainly enriches the knowledge sharing efforts of the project, Sustain Southern Maine should consider pursuing easily implementable yet innovative activities to build capacity and share knowledge among its constituents. Building a social media network through Facebook and Twitter as well as readily sharing progress and pertinent literature online is one example of employing a creative means to extend the project's reach once the website is functional. Further, more interactive activities, trainings or workshops such as the Meeting in the Box and site visits to local examples of sustainable development are both simple methods to develop excitement and investment in the project while sharing regional knowledge.

Another simple means of expanding this project's efforts is by improving the communication among the partnership members by implementing more frequent and more structured meetings. While it is certainly difficult to schedule around such an expansive number of participants, it is central to this project's success that the consortium is actively meeting and having the appropriate dialogues necessary to sustain momentum to the next step. Unfortunately, infrequent communication among the project's partnership has led to a lack of tangible success further thwarting capacity building efforts. Despite these obstacles Sustain Southern Maine still has ample opportunity to improve their capacity building efforts through relatively simple initiatives. It will be vital for the success of Sustain Southern Maine to capitalize on these easily attainable knowledge sharing practices and implement them as soon as possible.

CONCLUSION

The ten grantee efforts examined here illustrate projects with a broad spectrum of geographies and grant funding levels ranging from \$225,000 to over \$4.5 million. Despite differences in the governance and structure of the projects, many of the grantees employed similar tools in fulfilling the capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement for the SCRPG program. Although there was variance in the level of reliance on each method, the implementation of working groups, subsequent reporting of progress, speakers and interactive working groups were the most popular means to expand regional expertise. In many cases, these activities were framed within the public involvement and community outreach efforts of each project. While both capacity building and public participation are in many ways connected, independent efforts to fulfill both of these components is also important so that partnership and consortium members can establish a broad base of regional knowledge to effectively address community issues. Among the criteria used to evaluate each program within this paper, site visits was the least used tool implicating a potential untapped resource for knowledge sharing and expanding expertise. Regardless, all the organizations seem to be actively working towards fulfilling the

capacity building requirement despite the unique challenges it presents. The SCRPG program has provided a distinct opportunity for planning agencies to actively participate in determining the future of their respective regions. Encompassing the tenets of new regionalism, grantees are working towards uncovering alternative solutions to planning issues that have long plagued experts in this profession such as equity and urban sprawl. The capacity building and knowledge sharing requirement acknowledges these complicated issues as a threat to sustainable development on a regional level and attempts to expand understanding through technical expertise. While this requirement comes with its own set of challenges, it is central to the success of the SCRPG program in that it provides a common foundation for the grantee partnerships to work collaboratively as they plan for a sustainable future on a regional scale.

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APPENDIX A

Lead Agency and Regional Plan Contact Information

Sustainable Eastern Connecticut

sustaineasternct.org

Social Media:

facebook.com/sustaineasternct

twitter.com/#!/sustaineastct

Lead Agency:

Windham Region Council of Governments

700 Main St.

Willimantic, CT 06226

wincog.org/

P: (860) 456-2221

Our Vital Signs

ourvitalsigns.com

Social Media:

facebook.com/ourvitalsigns

twitter.com/#!/rvitalsigns

YouTube: youtube.com/ourvitalsigns

Lead Agency:

Rockford Metropolitan Agency for Planning

313 N. Main Street

Rockford, IL 61101

rmapil.org

P: (815) 964-RMAP

The Tomorrow Plan

thetomorrowplan.com

Social Media:

facebook.com/thetomorrowplan

twitter.com/#!/thetomorrowplan

slideshare.net/thetomorrowplan

Lead Agency

Des Moines Area Metropolitan Planning
Organization

420 Watson Powell, Jr. Way

Suite 200

Des Moines, IA 50309

dmampo.org

P: (515) 334-0075

GrowNC

gro-wnc.org

Social Media:

facebook.com/joinGroWNC

twitter.com/#!/joingrownc

youtube.com/joingrownc

slideshare.net/grownc

Lead Agency

Land-of-Sky Regional Council

339 New Leicester Hwy

Suite 140

Asheville, NC 28806

landofsky.org

P: (828) 251-6353

Sustainable Thurston

trpc.org/regionalplanning/sustainability

Lead Agency

Thurston Regional Planning Council

2424 Heritage Court SW

Suite A

Olympia, WA 98502

trpc.org

P: (360) 956-7575

St. Louis Regional Sustainable Communities

ewgateway.org/rpsd/

Lead Agency:

East-West Gateway Council of Governments

1 Memorial Drive

Suite 1600

St. Louis, MO 63102

ewgateway.org

P: (314) 421-4220 or (618) 274-2750

ECOS

ecosproject.com/

Social Media:

facebook.com/ecosproject

twitter.com/#!/ECOSproject

flickr.com/photos/ecosproject/

Lead Agency:

Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission

110 West Canal St.

Suite 202

Winooski, VT 05404

ccrpcvt.org

P: (802) 846-44

Plan for Opportunity

gulfcoastplan.org

Social Media:

facebook.com/planforopportunity

flickr.com/photos/12663666@N00/

Lead Agency

Gulf Regional Planning Commission

1232 Pass Rd.

Gulfport, MS 39501

grpc.com

P: (228) 864-1167

PlanET

planeasttn.org

Social Media:

facebook.com/planet-plan-east-tennessee

twitter.com/#!/planeasttn

youtube.com/user/PlanEastTN

Lead Agency:

City of Knoxville

City County Building

400 Main St.

Knoxville, TN 37902

cityofknoxville.org

P: (865) 215-2500

Capital Region Sustainable Communities

capitalregionscrpg.org

Lead Agency

Capital Area Regional Planning Commission

City County Building

210 Martin Luther King, Jr. Blvd.

Madison, WI 53701

capitalarearpc.org/

P: (608) 266-4137