

Regional Networks Partnership Pilot Program:

Workbook Documents for Prairie State Network

Version 2 - 11/30/2016

Submitted by:

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September 8, 2016

Revised 11/30/16

Network Purpose and Vision Development

Discussion January 20, 2016

1. **Network Vision:** *What founding principle drives the network?*

The Prairie State Local Government Sustainability Network's (PSN) vision is for all communities in Illinois to become more sustainable.

2. **Network Purpose:** *1) Who is the network for? 2) What generative problem is it working on? 3) What type of activities will the network undertake?*

The PSN is an independent peer forum of municipal professionals in Illinois who manage sustainability, energy, and climate planning efforts. The Network provides peer-learning and resources to Network members interested in improving sustainability in their organization's operations and wider communities.

3. **Network Value Propositions:** *What are the specific benefits that members want to gain from participation, and how can the network offer this collectively?*

The Prairie State Network provides a cost-effective, accessible, and consistent platform to discuss local government operations and programming with the goal of improving sustainability. Members exchange ideas and information with peers who share a similar economy, culture, and regulatory framework.

Network Communications

Discussed February 17, 2016

1. How do members / potential members currently communicate (for example: phone, e-mail, meetings)?

The Prairie State Network members primarily communicate via phone during the monthly calls, informal calls, and via e-mail.

2. What are the current barriers to communications, and what would be the most beneficial types of information sharing for your network (consider size and geographic reach, and content)?

Current barriers include the following:

- Workload – hard for some members to get on the monthly calls
- Website – website platform is difficult for multiple people to make updates to, putting the burden of making updates and sharing information on one person; Members would like to more fully transition to the USDN website but need to invest some time in training before doing so.
- Topics Not interesting – even within the membership criteria, we have a diverse set of staff that do not all find the same topics interesting, making it less attractive for all members to be on each call

3. As of now, what is the best way to contact potential members (for example: e-mail, phone)?

Currently the best way to contact potential members is by e-mail or phone call.

4. What type of member meetings would work best for your network (for example: annual face-to face meetings, phone working groups, committee meetings)?

The Prairie State Network places highest value on the annual meeting and monthly calls as a second priority. We have had success in the past with having sub-committee meetings for small groups to dive into a specific topic and present results back to the larger group.

5. What elements within a website would be useful to the network and members (for example: databases, file sharing, group chat, forums)?

The USDN website has features that would be very helpful and the Prairie State Network would like to use them more fully. File sharing, chat groups/boards are the two most important/valuable. It is also valuable to have a place to look up member information that is user defined rather than static on a spreadsheet. The Prairie State Network also finds value in a PUBLICLY FACING website as we often have new members contact us. That is one downside to the USDN website as it currently stands. There is very little content/information that non USDN members are able to access.

6. What would be the best way to survey members (for example: online, e-mail, hard-copy during a face to face meeting)?

On-line/electronic surveys have been pretty effective in the past. Gathering input at an annual meeting is also valuable for the Network and we have done that in the past.

7. What types of published documents would best benefit the network, and how frequently should they be released (for example: newsletters, reports, briefings)?

An annual summary of survey responses would be extremely beneficial to the group so we can understand how we are similar, different, ideas for collaboration and how to plan/schedule the calls. The Network is also interested in a sustainability report card/benchmark of metrics across the Prairie State Network. We have discussed the idea of a collaborative project to leverage the Leading STAR Indicators project and/or other tools to create a report card for Illinois communities. This is an active area of collaboration for the network.

8. Who will be responsible for network communications, how can responsibility be shared, and can communications be simplified while still being impactful?

We currently have a rotating position for the communications chair person. That person helps to send out the meeting reminders and takes meeting notes.

Annual Work Plan

Discussed July 20, 2016

1. Based on the vision/mission of the network, what goals would your organization like to achieve this fiscal year (for example: improved relationship development between members, build stronger relationships with members outside of the leadership team, evolve beyond information sharing to support collaborative work groups, identify and secure new funding opportunities)?

In the next year, the Prairie State Network would like to accomplish the following:

Continue exchanging ideas in the following formats:

- Monthly calls
- In-person meeting
- Other opportunities – website, USDN website
- Person to person contact outside of meetings

Enhance and Expand Membership

- Expand membership to include non-represented cities
- Increase level and frequency of participation in the monthly call as well as other planned activities by Network Members
- Support Network Members in engaging their colleagues in advancing sustainability in their organizations.
 - One example is the sustainable economic development work that Park Forest has brought to the group. Members could learn about this work in a conference call setting and then take steps to include members incorporating those best practices into their daily work.

Foundational documents

- Create / update foundational documents and governance details for the Network.
- Prioritize next steps at the start of the year to focus efforts of PSN

Work as a network to influence community and county leaders to get more involved in advancing sustainability.

2. What projects and activities will support/achieve the overarching goals (for example: incorporate relationship building activities into the annual meeting, host quarterly information sharing webinars, create a funder briefing document to share with prospective funders)?
 - Fully transition to the use of the USDN website for Network information sharing; retain public website for introductory contact information only.
 - Plan an in-person meeting for some time in the next 6 months.
 - Finalize and share documents which outline our membership, governance, annual plan, etc.
 - Create a steering committee to oversee the management of the group; actively pursue funding for a network coordinator role.
 - Plan and schedule monthly conference calls with the input of the whole network to meet a wide variety of needs.
 - Collaborate with the Illinois Municipal League to highlight Illinois community sustainability success and try to inspire action by other communities.
 - Reach out to municipal organizations, such as IML and ILCMA regarding integrating sustainability topics into their work; offer to deliver presentations or briefing papers.

- Conduct a membership drive to re-connect with past members and get in touch with potential new members. Create a calling tree to reach out to members who have not been engaged; Create a survey to member feedback; Create a google document to track existing and proposed member

3. How can the network make specific goals that are measurable and attainable (keeping specific goals small and assigning responsibility)?

Once the Steering Committee is in place, measurable and time bound goals need to be articulated for each of the items listed in #1 above and assigned to one of the Committee Members. It may be that we cannot do all of these items at one time so we can create a phased approach if necessary.

4. What is the network currently working on, and what progress has been / is being made (for example: increasing network bandwidth, growing membership, developing steering committees, annual conference organization, funding programs)?

The last 9 months have been challenging for the Prairie State Network. Without any notice, the Chicago Community Trust ended their support of a network coordinator in December. At the same time, one of the Network's key members went on a maternity leave. The Network continued with this Pilot and had to do all the work to convene the calls with volunteers taking turns with various tasks. Going through the workbook and continuing with regular calls was a primary goal. There have been some discussions and conference calls around the idea of collaborating on a sustainability report card for Illinois Communities. We are in the phase of looking for collaborators and framing the idea. The next task is to form the Steering Committee and start organizing an in-person meeting. Dividing up the responsibilities will be key for the Network to continue to function.

5. Where does current work fall with regard to future goals, and is current work in line with the direction the network is headed?

The Prairie State Network's current work is definitely in line with our future goals. The Network is at a tipping point of how we take the network to the next level. The USDN Pilot program has been helpful.

6. How will the network measure progress and achievements (for example: comparative studies to past endeavors, post-event member surveys)?

Goals seem very achievable and SMART so it will be easy to measure progress. We just need to add timelines and assign people to take ownership.

7. What are the next steps that need to be taken in order achieve network goals (for example: planning committees can determine the specifics of implementation)?

The Prairie State Network needs to develop a draft work plan after the Steering Committee is formed.

8. What other information would be useful to members in the annual work plan (for example: organizational background information, data from previous years)?

It would be helpful to have the past member surveys and budget from our last 3 in-person meetings. If we organize the event ourselves, we can cut down on the cost very significantly.

Membership Guidelines

Discussion on June 22, 2016

Eligibility

1. What characteristics do members share (for example: affiliations, job responsibilities, geographic location, past work, etc.)?
 - Local government employees in Illinois, including counties; and
 - Managers, directors, or designated special project coordinators; and
 - Actively engaged in cross departmental work plan or implementation for one or more of the following: "triple bottom line" sustainability, resource management, and climate mitigation, adaptation, or resiliency
2. What requirements must members meet (for example: participation, dues, etc.)?

Prairie State Network Members are expected to do the following:

- Review and provide annual feedback on guidelines for membership and participation
 - Actively participate in monthly conference calls as scheduled by the Network
 - Facilitate calls on a rotating basis by leading discussion and helping facilitate questions and answers
 - Recommend discussion topics and secure guest speakers
 - Present best practices and case studies from your local experience
 - Distribute agendas, minutes, and supporting materials when serving as call facilitator
 - Bring enthusiasm and a collaborative spirit to the Network
 - Attend periodic face to face meetings, expected to be one per year or every 18-months
3. How do members join (for example: open group or referral only)?
 - Procedure for accepting members include the following:
 - Interested individuals submit an application and a resume. PSN membership then takes a vote yes or no to accept that member via an on-line survey; A majority of members must vote yes for the member to be accepted.
 - The new member then has access to the monthly calls, in person meeting, leadership and volunteer roles and the membership list.
 - Procedure for expelling members include the following:
 - People should actively participate or they should not be members.
 - Members are accepted on a 2 year term; at the end of the term someone who is not participating can determine if he or she wants to seek a renewal
 - For members who are involved now, recommend to commence with randomly assigning who has 1 or 2 years. Moving forward , all new people will start on 2 year term.

Benefits *(for Members)*

1. What will members gain from participation in the network (for example: peer-to-peer learning, information sharing, conferences, grant opportunities, etc.)?

Members of the Prairie State Network benefit from a cost-effective, accessible, and consistent platform to discuss local government operations and programming with the goal of improving sustainability. Members exchange ideas and information with peers who share a similar economy, culture, and regulatory framework.

Financial Contributions

1. Do members have enough network buy in to support requiring a financial contribution? How can you tell?

The Prairie State Network members find value in the Network and would be willing to seek financial support from their organizations to participate. Martha Dooley (Schaumburg) volunteered to help develop a budget so the Network could determine what financial support would be needed from members to support on-going coordination and the annual meeting. Members also indicated an ability to pay a reasonable fee for meals and supplies for an annual meeting from their office budgets.

2. How are these contributions structured (for example: size of affiliated organization, level of participation, in kind payment for annual meeting participation, etc.)?

The Network has not yet come up with a structure but will do so after seeing what the budget of the Network needs to look like.

3. How are contributions collected (for example: annually, quarterly, etc.)?

The Network has not yet finalized the frequency but we preliminary discussed an annual contribution to support the network for the following year, similar to how USDN collects dues.

Expectations of Members

1. What is required of members (for example: consider committee membership, advancement of network goals, and participation in activities, communication with group, etc.)?

Prairie State Network Members are expected to do the following:

- Maintain guidelines for membership and participation
- Actively participate in monthly conference calls as scheduled by the Network
- Facilitate calls on a rotating basis by leading discussion and helping facilitate questions and answers
- Recommend discussion topics and secure guest speakers
- Present best practices and case studies from your local experience
- Distribute agendas, minutes, and supporting materials when serving as call facilitator
- Bring enthusiasm and a collaborative spirit to the Network

Annual Meeting

Discussed April 21, 2016

1. What does the network need most right now (for example: to connect, to focus on content, to collaborate, to strengthen leadership)?
 - Increase personal connections,
 - Provide peer sharing and education
 - Work on a collaborative project

2. What are the meeting goals?
 - To provide an in-person opportunity to connect with other members
 - Evaluate the last year's activities of the Network
 - Plan for the next year's activities
 - Work on network governance issues;
 - Provide a balance of expert advice with peer sharing
 - Chance to network outside of formal presentations and casually sharing things

3. Who is best suited to handle the meeting event planning details, and how can this responsibility be shared?

In the past, the Prairie State Network received financial support from the Chicago Community Trust to plan and host the in-person meeting. Members agree it was very helpful to have professional help in this area. However, the Members also agreed that cost could be reduced in this area and most members felt they would be able to contribute a modest amount to support the food and meeting logistics. A sub-committee for the in-person meeting could help address many of the details that were previously handled by the professional planner.

4. What dates, location, financial model, and agenda make the most sense for my network, given where they are in maturation (emerging, developing, mature)?

Traditionally the Network held the in-person meetings in the spring. Fall seems to be a heavy time for annual meetings/conferences so spring is better.

The preferred agenda/schedule includes arriving on the afternoon of day 1, full day 2 and ½ day 3. Length and timing can be adjusted based on member input. The group agreed it was important to have a combination of both programmed and unprogrammed time in the agenda. One suggestion was having travel covered by participants but the meeting planning and food paid for by grants/funding. In the past the Network had one member "host" the meeting and arrange for the meeting space. This would work well in a committee approach.

5. How will you find out what are the primary topics of interest, and the member expectations are?

In the past we have done a survey and we also had a subcommittee who helped the paid consultant with the planning. We would do this approach again for our next meeting.

6. What should the State of Our Network presentation address (annual work plan update, member survey data, etc.)?
 - We have not done this before but could do it if we find that it would be valuable.
 - Info we would want to include:
 - Highlights from the member survey
 - Statistics on members and their communities, participation in calls
 - Annual work plan goals
 - Network accomplishments from the last year
 - Goal setting or looking forward for the network
 - Someone on the planning committee will need to put this together so we'll have to take that into account; Scale up or down the presentation based on how much time we have.
 - Maybe Edith at the MMC would have

7. What specific activities in the agenda will build and strengthen relationships between members (ice breakers, evening reception activities, meeting buddies, etc.)?

Informal networking time and the site visits/tours, dinner; formal ice breaking activity, Meeting buddies may be good for new people to their role – assigned ahead of time

8. How should the sessions be structured to support the meeting goals (for example: PowerPoint presentations, breakout conversations, field trips, etc.)?

Mixed formats so we have a variety; could consider a charrette format for a topic/issue that a lot of people are dealing with

- Shopping Bag Ordinance would be a good topic
- Need to pick something that would be relevant to everyone

9. What should the Post Meeting Evaluation Survey contain? What information is needed to improve in the coming year?

Could do electronic survey at the end seeking feedback.

Governance and Leadership

Discussed January 20, 2016

1. Who makes the Decisions in the network?
 - a. Do all members have equal power?
 - b. Is there a subset of members to serve as a steering committee? Are there co-chairs? Are they elected or by volunteer basis?

Currently the Prairie State Network is member driven and there are no official designated leadership roles. The members who have been involved in the longest have become informal co-chairs but there is no formal role. Decision points/options are brought to the Network and members join the discussion to provide input. Effort is made to get a wide range of opinions but we move forward with a "vote" based on who is actively involved.

Our plan is to develop a Steering Committee.

2. What Network Decisions need to be made?

The most recent large decisions were whether to participate in the USDN Regional Network Pilot Program. Upcoming decisions will include how to go about seeking funding for a network coordinator, hiring process of a new coordinator, and where/when to hold the annual meeting.

3. How are Decisions Made?
 - a. Determine what decision-making types work best for the network and how they will be implemented. Types include: Imposition, Community, Democracy, Emergence

Right now, the approach of Community or Democracy seems to work best. This may change as we get a more formal steering committee.