

Regional Networks Partnership Pilot Program: A Roadmap for the Urban Sustainability Directors Network

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Executive Summary

This document presents a roadmap for Regional Networks of Sustainability Directors and The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN), and provides guidelines for a symbiotic relationship. By adopting and enacting network criteria, the Regional Networks can leverage USDN to better access vital resources - like funding and staff support. In turn, USDN is able to explore dissemination and multi-city adoption of innovations beyond just the USDN membership, which is a strategic interest to the network.

The ultimate goals of this Regional Networks Partnership Pilot Program are to: 1) Define and strengthen the relationships between USDN and Regional Networks of Sustainability Directors in North America, supporting field building in urban sustainability in the process; 2) Formalize network building best practices for existing and emerging networks, so they can be supported as an urban sustainability field-building tool; 3) Provide support for interested networks for continued Regional Network growth; and 4) Scale field development opportunities through regional networks.

Regional Networks interested in participating in the Regional Network Pilot Partnership Program will self-select into one of two categories. Details for each category are found on pages 7-10 of this document.

- **USDN Affiliate Network:** meet some USDN network building standards and receive some support services from USDN; or
- **USDN Partner Network:** meet all USDN network-building standards and receive additional support services from USDN.

The primary difference between a USDN Affiliate and a USDN Partner Network is the amount and complexity of standards USDN requires and the amount and value of services USDN provides in exchange. Both network types agree to meet specific network building standards set by USDN, listed on pages 8-11. These standards are intended to guide the development of Regional Networks. The accompanying Regional Network Best Practices Workbook provides instruction and explanation of these network-building standards. It serves as a guidance resource to Regional Networks. There are six components to the Workbook:

1. USDN Regional Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide
2. USDN Regional Network Communications Plan Guide
3. USDN Regional Network Annual Work Plan Development Guide
4. USDN Regional Network Membership Guidelines Development Guide
5. USDN Regional Network Annual Meeting Planning Guide
6. USDN Regional Network Governance Structure Development Guide

Both USDN Affiliate and Partner Networks agree to complete the workbook, participate in the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC), and use the USDN website. Partner Networks also agree to survey their membership annually, have non-USDN member participation, coordinate with USDN to send and receive membership requests, maintain a co-chair and Steering Committee governance structure, and develop a succession plan. Both USDN Affiliate and Partner Networks receive support services from USDN in the form of basic coaching, access to network development resources, and website access. Partner Networks also receive survey support, individualized technical assistance and network support, and access to USDN grant opportunities.

Introduction

This section defines a Regional Network, outlines the purpose and goal of the program, and describes the pilot program.

Definition of a Regional Network

The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) defines a Regional Network as a member-driven network of local government sustainability professionals sharing similar geographical, cultural, and economic context. These networks include both USDN members and non-USDN members with a demonstrated job function of cross-departmental and community-wide collaboration to achieve local sustainability goals. Regional Networks are organic and structure themselves based on mutual interest and shared challenges. They can be a conglomerate of local governments sharing state boundaries, can span multiple states, or can share political environments.

Purpose and Goals of the Program

The initial 8 Regional Networks evaluated in the State of the Networks Report represent a wide array of communities, with individuals from 159 different communities. Sixty-seven of these people are not USDN members and rely on regional networks as their primary connection point to peers in the urban sustainability field. This aspect alone is of extreme value to USDN. Because the overarching network has a field building mission but also desires to stay small enough so members actually know each other and can build collaborative relationships, regional networks are a very strategic investment for USDN. It allows the network to accomplish both goals.

Each Regional Network was born from different inspirations, such as the need for members to survive the end of federal funding, or the desire to collaboratively approach adaptation planning. Despite these vastly different characteristics, the Networks face similar barriers in their evolution. For example, their volunteer leaders are at capacity just maintaining basic network functions, including face-to-face interaction. Across the regions, networks share the same need for third-party coordination support, funding for and organizing of their annual face-to-face meetings, and strategic network development guidance. Yet, these networks are acting independently when seeking resources to support these needs. Consequently, most have struggled to attain them. The State of the Networks Report's chief recommendation is for the regional networks to work together to achieve collective goals.

To accomplish USDN's goal of growing the field of urban sustainability but not necessarily USDN membership, and the Regional Networks goal of having access to critical resources that allow them to thrive and support non-USDN member peers in their work, this document presents a roadmap for Regional Networks and USDN. It provides guidelines for a symbiotic relationship. The Regional Networks, by adopting and enacting criteria, can leverage USDN to better access vital resources - like funding or staff

support. In turn, USDN is able to explore dissemination and multi-city adoption of innovations beyond just the USDN membership, which is a strategic interest to the network.

The ultimate goals of this program are to:

- Define and strengthen the relationships between USDN and Regional Networks of Sustainability Directors in North America, supporting field building in urban sustainability in the process;
- Formalize network building best practices for existing and emerging networks, so they can be supported as an urban sustainability field-building tool; and
- Provide coordination support for interested networks to continued Regional Network growth.

2015-2016 USDN Regional Network Pilot Partnership Program Overview

USDN and Innovation Network for Communities (INC) will pilot this program from September 2015 through August 2016. During this time, INC will provide support to the Regional Networks by: 1) staffing the USDN Regional Networks Coordinating Committee (RNCC); 2) documenting regional network building lessons learned and best practices in a guidance work book; 3) providing technical assistance to USDN Partner Regional Networks as they complete the workbook; and 4) offering coaching to emerging or interested but not yet affiliated Regional Networks about this USDN Regional Network Pilot Partnership Program. The hope is that this program will renew annually with foundation support. Currently, there is one year of dedicated funding to pilot this program. USDN, INC, and the RNCC will assess pilot program progress and value in February 2016, and again in May 2016. Pending program success, USDN and INC will discuss the potential for institutionalizing the program within USDN as one of its member offerings. If that occurs, the program will be refined based on lessons learned in the 2015-16 pilot.

Summary of How the Pilot Program Works

Regional Networks interested in participating in the Regional Network Pilot Partnership Program will self-select into one of two categories. Details for each category are found on pages 8-11 of this document.

- **USDN Affiliate Network:** meet some USDN network building standards and receive some support services from USDN; or
- **USDN Partner Network:** meet all USDN network-building standards and receive additional support services from USDN.

The primary difference between a USDN Affiliate and a USDN Partner Network is the amount and complexity of standards USDN requires and the amount and value of services USDN provides in exchange. Both network types agree to meet specific network building standards set by USDN, listed on pages 8-11. These standards are intended to guide the development of Regional Networks. Both USDN Affiliate and Partner Networks agree to complete the workbook, participate in the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC), and use the USDN website. Partner Networks also agree to survey their membership annually, have non-USDN member participation, coordinate with USDN to send and receive

membership requests, maintain a co-chair and Steering Committee governance structure, and develop a succession plan.

The accompanying Regional Network Best Practices Workbook provides instruction and explanation of these network-building standards. It serves as a guidance resource to Regional Networks. There are six components to the Workbook:

1. USDN Regional Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide
2. USDN Regional Network Governance Structure Development Guide
3. USDN Regional Network Communications Plan Guide
4. USDN Regional Network Annual Meeting Planning Guide
5. USDN Regional Network Membership Guidelines Development Guide
6. USDN Regional Network Annual Work Plan Development Guide

In exchange for meeting these standards, USDN will provide a range of regional network support services to participating Regional Networks. Below are two tables providing an at-a-glance summary of USDN services to participating networks and Regional Network program requirements.

Table 1. USDN Services to Participating Networks

	Affiliate Network	Partner Network
Regional Network Best Practices Workbook	X	X
Technical Assistance in Support of Workbook Completion	X	X
USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC) Participation	X	X
USDN.org Access	X	X
Member Surveys and Analysis		X
Network Building Strategy and Coordination Support		X
Access to USDN Regional Network Grant Offerings		X

Table 2. Regional Network Program Requirements

	Affiliate Network	Partner Network
Complete the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook	X	X
Participate in the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC)	X	X
Regional Network Coordinating Committee Participation	X	X
Use USDN.org to Support Network Communications	X	X
Participate in a Regional Network Member Satisfaction Survey		X
Include Membership from Non USDN Communities		X
Coordinate with USDN Regarding Routing New Members to the Appropriate Network		X
Maintain a Co-Chair and Steering Committee Leadership Structure		X
Discuss and Create a Leadership Succession Plan		X

At the beginning of the pilot program (July 2015), interested Regional Networks will opt into an Affiliate or Partner Tier by writing a Letter of Interest (LOI), detailed on page 11. They will each commit to meeting

the standards associated with each Tier by the close of the pilot program (September 2016). During this timeframe, participating Regional Networks will meet pilot program requirements by completing the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook. To support this process, technical assistance from INC will be provided to Regional Network leadership (one-on-one if needed, and through the RNCC bi-monthly calls). The goal of this assistance is to help complete the workbook for each participating network. Throughout the year, the RNCC meetings will focus on troubleshooting and sharing lessons from this process. The remainder of this document details the USDN standards and support services for Affiliate and Partner Tiers, as well as their requirements for obtaining USDN support.

Timeline at a Glance

Timeframe	Activity
June – July, 2015	Regional Networks Supporting Materials are published: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State of the Networks Report; • USDN Regional Network Partnership Program Roadmap; and • Regional Network Best Practices Workbook.
July – August, 2015	Regional Network leadership teams determine if they want to opt into the pilot program and at which Tier: USDN Affiliate Network or USDN Partner Network.
September, 2015	Interested Regional Networks submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) by September 16 th ** stating their intention to participate in the program, at what Tier, and their commitment to complete the program requirements by September 2016.
August – September, 2015	INC and each Regional Network that submitted an LOI develop a tailored technical assistance scope that will help each one achieve the standards of the Tier they have opted into.
September 2015 – September, 2016	Affiliate and Partner Networks complete the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook and the other program participation requirements outlined in this document.
July – September, 2016	USDN and INC review pilot program performance, discuss improvement opportunities, and evaluate the potential for institutionalizing the pilot program with USDN.

**NOTE: Should a network determine to participate in the program after the September 16th LOI deadline, they need to contact [Maggie Ullman](#) to schedule a call to discuss the possibility.

Partnership Program Eligibility

Building on the general definition of a Regional Network, found in the Introduction section of this document, the following eligibility requirements are designed to further refine the characteristics of a Regional Network of sustainability directors. Regional Networks considering a formal relationship with USDN meet the following criteria:

- They are member-driven networks of local government sustainability professionals who routinely collaborate across departments and throughout their communities to advance local government sustainability goals;
 - *Note: Members must only be city or county government officials; staff may be from any sector.*
- They share environmental, cultural, and economic contexts and can include metropolitan, state, multiple states, or shared federal structures;
- They must include active membership from at least 4 USDN members;
- They must have 12 or more active members to demonstrate a network base; and
- They must represent North American communities.

USDN Services to Regional Networks

Regional networks are important to USDN because they are uniquely positioned to further develop the field of urban sustainability. Regional Networks often have more opportunities for sustainability directors to interact face to face, based on proximity. They also have direct access to communities who are newly committed to sustainability best practices and policies. Because Regional Networks are so important to USDN's vision of field development, USDN is committed to providing support to these networks to ensure their continued success. The following is a list of services USDN will provide during this pilot period for applicable networks:

1. New Network Coaching

Available to: Any Network of Local Government Sustainability Directors

Detail: Coaching may take the form of informational or one-on-one calls, and will focus on network formation strategy, new member engagement, and/or strategy for a network kickoff meeting. This service will be performed as networks express interest.

2. Regional Network Best Practices Workbook

Available to: Any Network of Local Government Sustainability Directors

Detail: The Regional Network Best Practices Workbook details guided exercises for Regional Network leadership teams to conduct with their network members. This workbook outlines network building best

practices and is available for download on the USDN website, [here](#). You do not have to be a USDN member to access this document.

3. Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC)

Available to: USDN Affiliate and Partner Networks

Detail: The RNCC serves as a steering committee of Regional Networks leaders. The goal of the RNCC is to seek opportunities for information sharing and alignment across the regions. By working together, the RNCC will seek to: 1) achieve a level of consistency across regional networks; 2) leverage a collective voice to pursue funding opportunities together; 3) maintain a clearing house for regional network best practices; and 4) facilitate peer support between regional network leaders. The RNCC works together on bi-monthly calls. In 2015-2016, RNCC activities will focus on completing the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook and exchanging lessons learned around network building. Bimonthly activities are described in the detailed timeline on pages 10-11 of this document.

4. USDN.org Website Access and Website Support

Available to: USDN Affiliate and Partner Networks

Detail: The internal USDN website is available to members. It allows them to engage with other people in their regional network by exchanging information, asking and answering questions, and sharing documents. The information threads provide valuable information for peers to stay on top of what's happening in their field while gathering honest insights and feedback. This website can serve as a resource for Regional Network members to stay connected between face-to-face meetings. USDN will provide individual accounts for members in Affiliate or Partner Regional Networks, as well as provide website support, such as user tutorials.

5. Regional Network Member Surveys

Available to: USDN Partner Networks

Detail: Member surveys are an important tool networks can use to measure health. USDN provides design, coordination, and analysis for Partner Networks to survey their members. The data analysis provided through this survey will help Partner Networks assess progress and create successful work plans.

6. Network Support

Available to: USDN Partner Networks

Detail: Many Regional Networks lack support for strategy and infrastructure development. USDN and INC will work with applicable regional networks to define specific network needs. Examples of different support services may include:

- Steering Committee strategy or coordination;
- Annual meeting strategy planning; or

- Funding strategy development.

7. Regional Network Specific Grant Offerings

Available to: USDN Partner Networks

Detail: It is a possibility that Regional Network specific grant offerings could be made available through existing USDN grant fund programs during this pilot period. In the past, these grant opportunities have been designed to further support Regional Network growth and development. Funding availability and USDN funding priorities will determine if additional grants are offered. If this opportunity arises, details will be communicated to Partner Networks.

USDN Affiliate and Partner Network Responsibilities

There are two formal types of relationships a regional network can establish with USDN through this pilot program. Affiliate Networks will meet fewer network-building standards and will receive fewer services from USDN. Partner Networks will meet additional standards that lead to advanced network development, and in exchange will receive additional services from USDN. The purpose of the Tiers (Partner and Affiliate) and associated support services from USDN is to incentivize regional networks to implement network-building best practices and standards, which in turn will provide a clear vision, foundation, and operational procedures for each network.

Affiliate Network Responsibilities

1. Complete the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook to demonstrate the regional network has completed basic network building best practices. The workbook includes developing the following documents for your network:
 - a. USDN Regional Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide
 - b. USDN Regional Network Governance Structure Development Guide
 - c. USDN Regional Network Communications Plan Guide
 - d. USDN Regional Network Annual Meeting Planning Guide
 - e. USDN Regional Network Membership Guidelines Development Guide
 - f. USDN Regional Network Annual Work Plan Development Guide
2. Appoint two network members and up to one network coordinator to participate in the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC). During each meeting, the RNCC will go over one of the six components in the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook. RNCC participants will take this information back to their network and complete workbook sheets to submit to USDN in support of their program requirements. RNCC calls are every other month for 1.5 hours each. Networks participating in the program are required to attend all calls.

3. Commit to using the USDN.org website for network communications, and consider setting network website goals, such as how many members post monthly.

USDN Partner Network Responsibilities

1. Complete the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook to demonstrate the regional network has completed basic network building best practices. The workbook includes developing the following documents for your network:
 - a. USDN Regional Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide
 - b. USDN Regional Network Governance Structure Development Guide
 - c. USDN Regional Network Communications Plan Guide
 - d. USDN Regional Network Annual Meeting Planning Guide
 - e. USDN Regional Network Membership Guidelines Development Guide
 - f. USDN Regional Network Annual Work Plan Development Guide
2. Appoint two network members and up to one network coordinator to participate in the USDN Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC). During each meeting, the RNCC will go over one of the six components in the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook. RNCC participants will take this information back to their network.
3. Commit to using the USDN.org website for network communications, and consider setting network website goals, such as how many members post monthly.
4. Promote member participation in a regional network satisfaction survey conducted by USDN. Present the findings of the survey to network members as a network building activity:
 - a. Consider establishing targets for member participation in the survey; and
 - b. Develop a method for presenting findings. This can be determined by the Partner Network and could be a presentation of highlights at an annual meeting, a newsletter, or an all-member email.
5. Include membership from non-USDN communities. There is no percentage or number requirement for non-USDN members in this pilot program. The intention is for regional networks to evaluate their potential for regional field building, and to expand their network to build capacity in communities who are not currently supported by USDN.
6. Coordinate with USDN to assess and appropriately route new members to regional networks or USDN. Regional networks will actively welcome new member referrals from USDN. Regional Networks can serve as a USDN entry ground for communities that meet USDN requirements.
7. Maintain a co-chair and steering committee leadership structure.

8. Discuss and create a leadership succession strategy.

Detailed Pilot Program Timeline

Timeline	Activity
June – July, 2015	Regional Networks Supporting Materials are published: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State of the Networks Report; • USDN Regional Network Partnership Program Roadmap; and • Regional Network Best Practices Workbook.
July – August, 2015	Regional Network leadership teams determine if they want to opt into the pilot program and at which Tier: USDN Affiliate Network or USDN Partner Network.
September, 2015	Interested Regional Networks submit a Letter of Intent (LOI) by September 16 th ** stating their intention to participate in the program, at what Tier, and their commitment to complete the program requirements by September 2016.
August – September, 2015	INC and each Regional Network that submitted an LOI develop a tailored technical assistance scope that will help each one achieve the standards of the Tier they have opted into.
September, 2015 – September, 2016	Affiliate and Partner Networks complete the Regional Network Best Practices Workbook and the other program participation requirements outlined in this document, like meeting attendance.
Tentative RNCC Call Agendas	
September, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss: Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide • Participant Homework: Submit completed Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide by the next call
November, 2015	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Insights: Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision Development Guide • Discuss: Network Governance Structure Development Guide • Participant Homework: Submit Network Governance Structure Development Guide by the next call
January, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Insights: Network Governance Structure Development Guide • Discuss: Network Communications Plan Guide • Participant Homework: Submit Network Communications Plan Guide by the next call
March, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share Insights: Network Communications Plan Guide • Discuss: Annual Meeting Planning Guide • Participant Homework: Submit Annual Meeting Planning Guide by the next call

May, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share insights: Annual Meeting Planning Guide • Discuss: Membership Guidelines Development Guide • Participant Homework: Submit Membership Guidelines Development Guide by the next call
July, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share insights: Annual Meeting Planning Worksheet • Discuss: Annual Work Plan Development Guide • Participant Homework: Submit Annual Work Plan Development Guide (and any outstanding worksheets)
September, 2016	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share insights: Annual Work Plan Development Guide • Discuss: Next steps for the Regional Networks Partnership Program
July – September, 2016	USDN and INC review pilot program performance and discuss improvement opportunities and evaluate potential for institutionalizing program with USDN.

**NOTE: Should a network determine to participate in the program after the September 16th LOI deadline, they need to contact [Maggie Ullman](#) to schedule a call to discuss the possibility.

Pilot Program Letter of Intent

Interested Regional Networks need to **submit a 1-2 page Letter of Intent** to [Mia Arter](#), USDN Program Director, and [Maggie Ullman](#), INC Regional Networks Coordinator, **by 5 pm pacific time, September 16th, 2015**. USDN and INC will review these letters for completeness and applicability to the program intent. After review, and no later than September 30th, program acceptance letters will be issued from USDN to applicable networks.

This letter needs to include the following:

1. The network name.
2. The network leadership team including: name, jurisdiction, email address, and if they are a USDN core member, USDN associate member, or non-USDN member community.
3. Member list including: name, jurisdiction, and email address (please submit as an appendix)
4. Names of the Regional Network Coordinating Committee (RNCC) delegates. This will be up to two network leaders, and one network coordination support person (optional).
5. A statement of interest to participate in the pilot program, and the Tier the network will opt into.
6. A statement of commitment to complete the program workbook and requirements by September 2016.
7. A summary of which program requirements your network already meets (attach any supporting materials). For example, if a network already has a document about membership requirements please note that in the LOI, and attach the documentation.
8. Summarize which program requirements your network needs to complete during the pilot program.