USDN | urban sustainability directors network

USDN Long-Term Strategic Plan

FINAL DRAFT

I. PURPOSE OF THIS FINAL DRAFT

Dear USDN Members:

USDN is in the process of developing a first-ever Long-Term Strategic Plan to guide member collaborations through USDN over the next five years. This "Final Draft" of the USDN Long-Term Strategic Plan was developed by the USDN Planning Committee and staff as a tool to share draft concepts and seek the input of USDN members about a long-term strategy for USDN. The ideas contained here have resulted from member input at the 2015 USDN Annual Meeting in Minneapolis, a series of one-on-one interviews, and several work sessions of the Committee, USDN staff, and strategic planning consultants[1].

This document provides an overview of key findings from the planning process, outlines four goals to anchor USDN's strategic plan, and identifies strategies to advance those goals over the next five years. It also identifies key questions we're especially interested in posing to USDN members as we seek to develop a Long-Term Strategic Plan responsive to the needs and desires of USDN members. The Planning Committee and USDN staff will be seeking input from all members on the content of this draft plan before, during, and after our 2016 Annual Meeting in Toronto.

It is our hope that **by the end of 2016, members will achieve broad agreement on USDN's strategic vision, goals, and key strategies to guide our collaborations for the next five years**. Thank you for participating in this important work with us.

- Michael Armstrong City of Portland, Vicki Bennett Salt Lake City, and Nils Moe USDN Managing Director

II. FINDINGS: EVOLUTION OF URBAN SUSTAINABILITY AND USDN

EVOLUTION OF THE URBAN SUSTAINABILITY FIELD

As urban sustainability moves from an emerging discipline to an established field of practice, it now faces the evolutionary challenge of demonstrating large-scale impact, not just conceptual appeal and profuse experimentation. Ultimately, this involves identifying practices that have consistently shown superior results and can be used as a benchmark or standard, and enabling communities to adopt the practices with adjustments to address variations in local context. As the most successful practices spread, they become new norms, expected practices, and implicit standards for the field.

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[1] Participants: Committee Co-chairs: Michael Armstrong and Vicki Bennett; Committee Members: Austin Blackmon, Barbara Buffaloe, Debbie Raphael, Jenita McGowan, Matt Naud, Mark Hartman, Nicole Woodman, Peter Nierengarten, Rob Phocas, and Zach Baumer; USDN staff: Nils Moe, Garrett Fitzgerald, Johanna Partin, Mia Arter, Natalie Narotzky; Consultants: Peter Plastrik, Maggie Ullman, Katherine Gajewski, and Jill Simmons.

Significant developments in the urban sustainability field include:

- **A growing number of city and urban county governments in North America have established sustainability structures**—directors and offices (of varying formality, size, resources, and authority)—to drive the development and implementation of sustainability agendas and plans. These communities are diverse in size and socio-economic profile and are present in every region of the United States and Canada. In a small number of cities that have made the most progress, sustainability is being more deeply integrated with core city planning functions and into departments.

- In many sustainability content areas, **a proliferation of promising practices, policies, and programs is occurring**, thanks to experimentation by numerous communities, philanthropic funding for innovative efforts, and the spread of ideas between communities.

- **Serious climate action planning and implementation—for carbon reduction and climate change preparedness—is becoming increasingly important** to the city sustainability agenda. More than 40 USDN member-communities have committed to 80x50 GHG-reduction goals; more than 100 North American cities have joined the Compact of Mayors.

- **Important assets for the field are being developed and deployed:**
  - Sustainability frameworks to organize goals, objectives and practices: STAR Communities Framework, CNCA Framework for Deep Carbon Reduction
  - Indicators for performance monitoring: STAR Community Rating System®, CDP Cities, and GHG Inventories.
  - Increased technical expertise in private consulting and engineering firms and nonprofits. For example, a 2014 study by Meister Consultants Group identified 135 organizations and networks focused on resilience, more than half of them nonprofits.
  - An information-rich environment has emerged about sustainability practices and more city-focused networks for exchange, learning, and demonstration are emerging—organized by funders, nonprofits, state and federal governments.
  - Some large environmental organizations (e.g., The Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Defense Council) have begun to focus on urban areas and city government leadership as a way of achieving their goals.

EVOLUTION OF USDN

As a network, USDN also faces the evolutionary challenge of demonstrating its on-the-ground impact and contribution to the growth of the urban sustainability field while maintaining its core value as a peer network for individual members. This requires more than expanding the number of communities engaging in the peer-to-peer connectivity that enables robust exchange and learning. It means making a substantial, measurable, and recognized contribution to sustainability practice development and adoption in cities. To do this, USDN will need to strengthen and focus its efforts to develop and implement sustainability practices in U.S. and Canadian local governments.

Significant developments in USDN include:

- USDN membership has grown to more than 145 sustainability directors, with about 600 additional specialist staff and non-member sustainability directors in regional networks participating in various network activities. Annual turnover in membership has been 15-25%. USDN-inspired and supported regional networks now contain 97 USDN members and 86 non-USDN cities.

- Despite the "churn" in membership, USDN members have developed and maintained a notably high degree of connectivity with each other and high rates of participation in USDN exchange-and-learning activities.

- USDN's annual budget reached more than $2 million in 2015, a five-fold increase since the network started. About 11% of revenues came from member dues, with the balance in grants from 10 U.S.-based foundations.

- Over the years, the content areas that have attracted the most member interest have been Energy Systems (both Energy Efficiency and Energy Supply) and Climate Preparedness/ Resilience Planning.

- While most members engage substantially with local business and community-based organizations, they are not strongly connected to leading national-scale nonprofit and philanthropic organizations in the field.

USDN'S ROLE IN ADVANCING COMMUNITY SUSTAINABILITY

A network is a tool to exchange value between people through relationships. The 'connect-align-produce' sequence is a foundational network concept that explains how this tool is best used to produce value (Figure 1). To date, USDN's primary focus has been building the network tool through connecting and producing activities. The relationships at the core of the network create value because the network fosters connections between members (i.e. annual meeting) and produces new knowledge through collaborative learning (i.e. Innovation Fund grant projects and peer exchange work groups). USDN has fostered alignment in minor ways by incentivizing small groups of members to agree on collaboration

Figure 1. Connect-Align-Produce Sequence

project topics when seeking Innovation Fund support and by facilitating group discussions on certain policy and partnership issues (e.g., utility data access), but largely USDN has yet to try to foster broader alignment among practitioners. The production outcomes of the network thus far have been fragmented due to this lack of alignment.
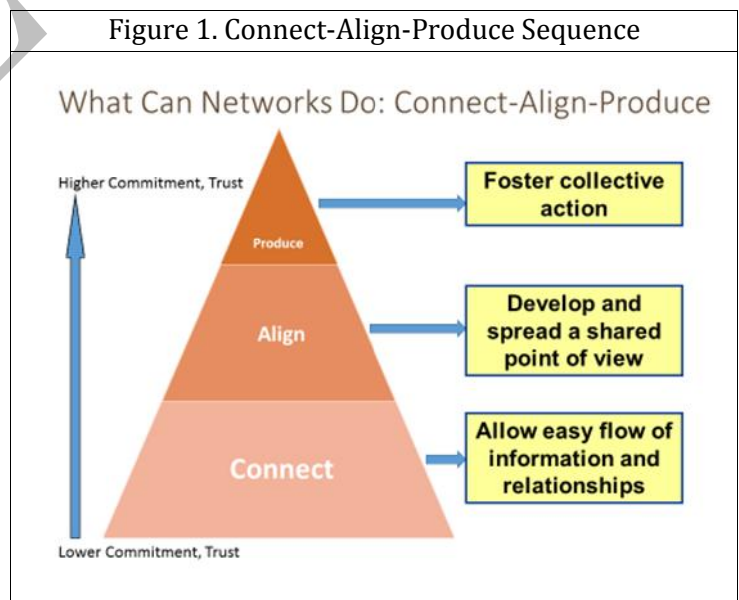
This Long-Term Strategic Plan proposes that USDN maintain a commitment to support connection and production activities, while integrating strategies to foster alignment in the field around practices that have the potential to produce the highest impact in urban sustainability.

III. FINDINGS: LESSONS FOR LONG-TERM PLANNING

Supported by strategic planning consultants, the USDN Planning Committee and staff embarked on a process in 2015 to explore strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats from a variety of stakeholder perspectives (e.g., members, funders, partners) to inform the development of a long-term strategic plan.

Key findings from the multi-stakeholder interview process with bearing on our long-term planning include:

1. **Peer exchange is and should remain a core function.** USDN has been a "by, of and for" network of members since its inception. It has invested heavily in building the peer connectivity that is the basis for efficient and effective exchange and learning—and members' levels of participation and satisfaction are consistently high. Increasing rigor and evolving processes to increase efficacy could be wise, but we should not evolve into an organization that looks drastically different than what we are today. All of the stakeholders interviewed see USDN's ability to accelerate peer exchange and innovate across our network as a core value offering and felt that peer exchange is foundational to enabling innovation and accelerating impact.

2. **We should also boldly embrace opportunities to accelerate impact.** Although peer exchange serves as an essential foundation, stakeholders encouraged us to think big across the 5-year horizon, agreeing that refining processes and aligning resources for greater impact is important (especially in light of COP21 goals, etc.). USDN's success in building a robust network provides a unique opportunity to generate substantial impact on the sustainability of U.S. and Canadian cities. USDN has potential to further accelerate impact through strategically supporting innovation and acceleration of good practices. Some suggested we ratchet up our vision statement to move cities toward a carbon neutral goal, while others suggested we identify 2-3 long-term, challenging goals and move a cohort of the membership towards achieving some of those goals (100% renewable energy, sustainable consumption, etc.), and still others preferred to let members define what "significant and achievable impact" would mean for their community.

3. **Evolve USDN structure and functions to better accelerate and demonstrate impact.** The diffuse, ad hoc, and organic nature of peer exchange and collaboration in USDN has made it difficult to measure widespread impact on the sustainability of cities. USDN needs to ensure and demonstrate that network activities are achieving on-the-ground impact in cities. More information is needed about the impacts resulting from existing core peer exchange and exchange activities as well as innovation investments. New efforts to drive innovation and accelerated adoption should be designed with strategies in place to measure and report on on-the-ground impacts resulting from those activities. USDN should evolve its organizational model and programs to support and

demonstrate real-world impact and growth in the field of urban sustainability, while keeping peer learning and exchange as its essential core.

4. **Define content boundaries and adopt a framework for prioritizing innovation and scaling efforts.** USDN has become a respected voice of urban sustainability practitioners, and established itself as a place where those practitioners connect and learn from one another. In so doing, USDN has amassed significant knowledge and resources across a wide array of urban sustainability practices, but the network has never formally adopted a framework by which to organize, deliver, and measure its impact in cities. USDN may benefit from more clearly defining the content boundaries of urban sustainability (e.g., the universe of topics that USDN members are interested in). USDN may also benefit from developing a prioritization framework to support strategic investment in innovation and scaling efforts (e.g., identifying specific practices to foster accelerated adoption) to help the network prioritize, measure, and communicate its impact in cities and on the field of urban sustainability. Stakeholders agreed that investing in a third-party program evaluation would be helpful in the early stages of the strategic process.

5. **Invest strategically, but don't over-specialize.** Accelerating innovation and adoption of best practices may require strategically focusing some of USDN's resources and activities on targeted practices. However, most stakeholders believe that focusing on too narrow a set of sustainability practices could be detrimental, and that USDN should create avenues to support meaningful progress across a broad range of communities. Most felt that both breadth and depth of impact are important and that USDN should not abandon one for the other. Funders believed that significantly constricting membership would be a red flag for their trustees. Many funders very much appreciated the diversity of USDN membership and felt that this was a strong asset.

6. **Building strong partnerships is and will continue to be very important.** Engaging partners can enable USDN to cultivate external support and catalyze resources to help cities implement high-impact practices. Developing partnerships can also position USDN to quickly mobilize membership on key issues, and as a go-to voice for funders and federal partners interested in fostering action in cities. Partnerships may be a critical tool for helping to accelerate adoption and impact. Most stakeholders see significant upside in USDN working with a close set of partners, and some external organizations are eager for deeper partnership.

7. **Diversify revenue streams.** USDN is extraordinarily fortunate to have strong philanthropic partners with whom we collaborate closely. Our funders noted that USDN is well respected in the field of urban sustainability, and across the board, funders appreciate that we are exploring a long-term vision and possible evolution of our approach. Our core funding partners are generally pleased with the value generated by USDN and we foresee continued collaboration. However, USDN is heavily reliant on a small number of foundations which provide 90% of revenues. This is unlikely to be a sustainable business model. Interviewed stakeholders acknowledged that we should explore ways to diversify revenue and become a more resilient organization, including potentially increasing revenues coming from the direct beneficiaries of our activities, but we should not do so at a cost of vastly decreased membership.

8. **Set a five-year time horizon for the Strategic Plan.** To ensure that USDN has time to implement new programs and achieve the plan's ambitious goals, the draft plan proposes a five-year time horizon, with regular reporting and evaluation along the way to assess progress and impact.

IV. USDN MISSION, VISION, AND THEORY OF CHANGE

USDN MISSION

Connecting local government practitioners to accelerate urban sustainability in U.S. and Canadian communities

USDN VISION FOR 2022

USDN governments are leading the way to a sustainable, low-carbon future by developing, adopting, and sharing practices that create equitable and prosperous communities and a healthy environment.

USDN THEORY OF CHANGE

Peer exchange and collaboration between local government sustainability leaders catalyze the creation and implementation of urban sustainability solutions. The network creates change in the world by connecting members to share and learn from each other, incentivizing collaboration, and collectively leveraging resources.

The following goal statements[2] will guide network members to fulfill USDN's mission to accelerate urban sustainability. Over the next five years, USDN will:

1. **Maintain and Evolve the Peer Exchange Core:** Connect local government sustainability practitioners to advance urban practices through peer exchange and collaborative projects, fostering robust network connectivity and peer-to-peer relationships.
2. **Incentivize Innovation of High-Impact Sustainability Practices to Create Impact:** Grow the leading edge of urban sustainability through innovation by developing, testing, and refining next generation sustainability practices.
3. **Accelerate Adoption of High-Impact Sustainability Practices to Create Impact:** Accelerate adoption of high-impact sustainability practices in U.S. and Canadian communities through targeted technical assistance, collaborative projects, and implementation resources.
4. **Enhance Network Effectiveness:** Evolve USDN's organizational model to enhance network effectiveness. Ensure program model, membership structure, and financial resources support the strategic plan and position USDN as a long-term leader in the field of urban sustainability.

Figure 2. Phases of Practice Development: USDN Impact Pathway for Strategic Activities
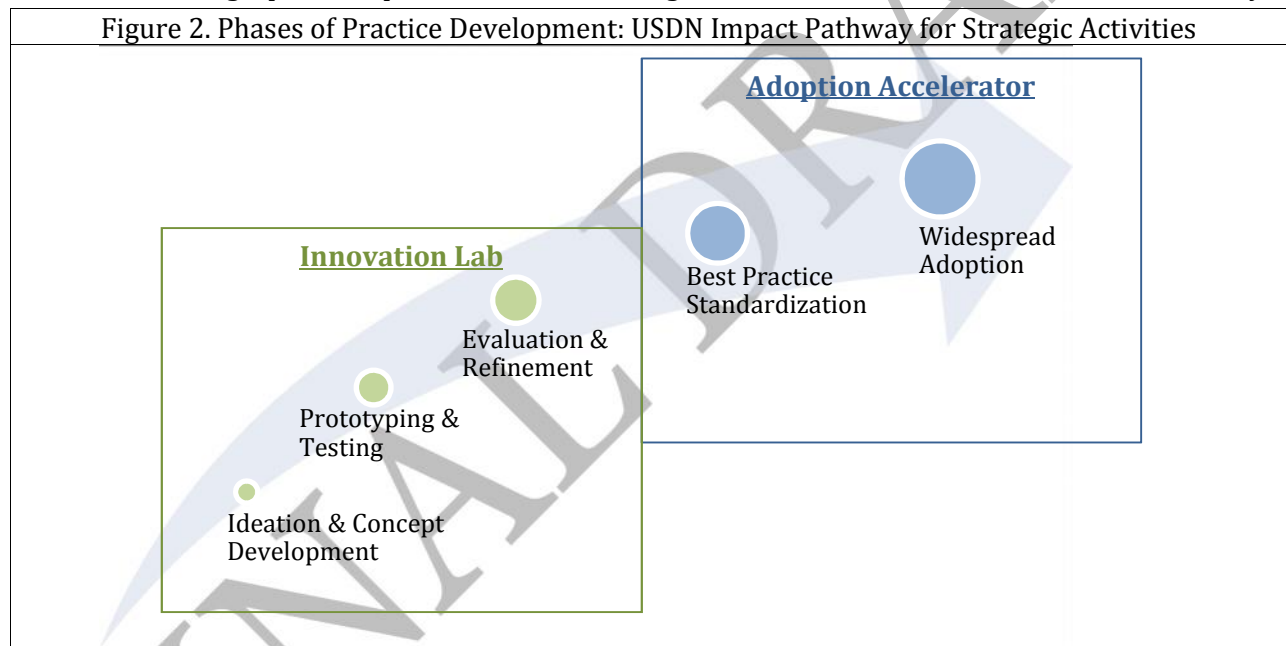
As shown in Figure 2, the draft plan maintains peer exchange as the foundation of USDN (goal 1). It also identifies a formal pathway to support innovation in the field of urban sustainability (goal 2) and help members accelerate widespread adoption of practices to enhance sustainability (goal 3).

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[2] In generative networks, members need to agree on what shared goals they want to achieve together. Yet it is important the organization does not presume all members agree on why these goals are important to each individual and each community. For example, goal two is to incentivize innovation. Some members want this because they represent a vanguard community and need the network to leverage resources in support of their community innovation. While other members believe this is important because their community needs a pipe line of innovative practices to serve as a road map for the future. Understanding that networks strive for goals where members hold different anchoring why concepts is important to understand this plan.

USDN STRATEGIC PLAN STRATEGIES SUMMARY

Over the next five years USDN will utilize the following 28 strategies to achieve the four goals of the strategic plan in service of the USDN mission, vision, and theory of change.

Table 1. Plan Goals		Plan Strategies
1.0	Maintain and Evolve the Peer Exchange Core	1.1. Continue to highly prioritize the USDN Annual Meeting as the flagship member connectivity opportunity. 1.2. Develop convening and connecting opportunities (outside of the Annual Meeting) for specialist members. 1.3. Grow and reposition the Peer Learning Exchange Fund as part of a larger USDN investment strategy. 1.4. Maintain Peer Exchange User Groups to facilitate member learning on sustainability issues and practices of joint interest. 1.5. Maintain coordination with regional networks to extend learnings and foster additional peer exchange opportunities for members. 1.6. Enhance mechanisms to improve understanding of and communicate the impact of USDN peer exchange. 1.7. Improve the website to be a hub of learning on sustainability practices.
2.0	Incentivize Innovation of High-Impact Sustainability Practices	2.1. Create Innovation Work Groups around prioritized practice areas. 2.2. Focus Innovation Lab projects on idea creation, prototyping, and evaluation. 2.3. Reposition and refocus the USDN Innovation Fund as a part of a larger USDN investment strategy. 2.4. Continue to support the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance.
3.0	Accelerate Adoption of High-Impact Sustainability Practices	3.1. Conduct a High Impact Practices member survey building on the 2016 Member Impact Survey to inform selection of the Pathway's high impact practices. 3.2. Conduct a member-led process to identify up to 15 High Impact Sustainability Practices for prioritized support. 3.3. Establish adoption goals and shared metrics for High Impact Sustainability Practices. 3.4. Create Adoption Accelerator Work Groups. 3.5. Make strategic investments to help large numbers of members advance implementation of prioritized actions. 3.6. Establish an Adoption Accelerator Grants Program. 3.7. Establish an Adoption Accelerator Peer Learning Grant offering.
4.0	Enhance Network Effectiveness	4.1. Redesign the USDN membership structure to clarify eligibility, benefits, and requirements. 4.2. Develop a multi-year funding plan anchored by a diversified revenue stream. 4.3. Develop a common framework through which members are asked to report innovation and adoption efforts. 4.4. Develop USDN-wide strategies for Investments, Partnerships, and Secondary Networks, to coordinate programs and investments across USDN's peer learning and innovation and impact. 4.5. Develop a formalized Partnership Strategy with a goal to engage external partners and communicate with external audiences. 4.6. Work closely with key funders and partners to identify new resources. 4.7. Ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the work of the network. 4.8. Evaluate organizational structure options, including independent 501(c)3 status, and select and implement one for USDN going forward. 4.9. Develop performance measures across strategic plan goal areas. 4.10. Produce an annual State of the Network report.

GOAL 1: MAINTAIN AND EVOLVE THE PEER EXCHANGE CORE

USDN provides many services to facilitate peer exchange, including the USDN Annual Meeting, member peer exchange and user groups, the USDN.org website, connections to regional networks, and grant funds to support peer exchange. USDN will maintain its core function as a collaborative peer exchange network. Establishing strong network connectivity and peer-to-peer relationships will enable members to learn about, translate, and implement sustainability practices in their communities.

All USDN members identify peer exchange and learning as USDN's most important function. Members highly value the connectivity that has grown over the network's seven-year history and regularly report that connecting with peers across the country has helped them lead sustainability initiatives at home. USDN must implement new mechanisms to better understand the scope and scale of the impact that exchange through USDN has had in member communities.

The Peer Exchange Core will continue to provide the open space that is so highly valued by members to share ideas, connect, and collaborate on any urban sustainability topic and at any stage of practice development—be it birthing a new idea, refining a best practice, or collectively implementing a practice. By contrast, and discussed further below, the Innovation and Accelerated Adoption Pathway will focus on specific issue areas and high impact practices, as well as specific stages of practice development.

Goal 1 Strategies

1.1. **Continue to highly prioritize the USDN Annual Meeting as the flagship member connectivity opportunity** for primary USDN members (sustainability directors in each jurisdiction).

1.2. **Develop convening and connecting opportunities (outside of the Annual Meeting) for specialist members** (sustainability staff in USDN member communities, other than the sustainability director).

1.3. **Grow and reposition the Peer Learning Exchange Fund as part of an integrated USDN investment strategy** that provides grant funding opportunities to support the USDN impact pathway. Create more opportunities for intensive peer exchange, including activities that support USDN's Adoption Accelerator while acknowledging the need for peer learning around emergent practices (see Goal 3, Strategy 4).

1.4. **Maintain Peer Exchange User Groups to facilitate member learning on sustainability issues and practices of joint interest.** Evolve user group selection process to prioritize USDN staff support for Peer Exchange User Groups with significant level of member interest and annual work plan, while reserving resources for USDN staff support of new work groups that advance USDN's Innovation Lab and Adoption Accelerator (see Goal 2, Strategy 1; Goal 3, Strategy 4).

1.5. **Maintain coordination with regional networks to extend learnings and foster additional peer exchange opportunities for members.** Expand USDN impact by leveraging regional networks. Through regional networks, USDN will increase connectivity of participating USDN

members, disseminate learnings from within USDN to non-member communities, and build the capacity of member leaders.

1.6. **Enhance mechanisms to improve understanding of and communicate the impact of USDN peer exchange** in member communities.

1.7. **Improve the website to be a hub of learning on sustainability practices** and to disseminate USDN member knowledge and experience to other members and the general public.

GOAL 2: INCENTIVIZE INNOVATION OF HIGH-IMPACT SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES

Anchored by the USDN Innovation Fund, USDN has been fostering and supporting collaborative projects to develop new ideas and sustainability best practices for more than five years. Historically, the USDN Innovation Fund has invested in projects that span the practice development continuum, ranging from *innovating* new ideas to supporting multi-city *adoption* of a best practice.[3]

This strategic plan narrows USDN's focus on innovation to the first phases of practice development and sets a goal to grow the leading edge of urban sustainability by developing, testing, and refining next generation

Figure 3. Innovation Lab – Practice Development Phases

Widespread Adoption

Best Practice Standardization

Evaluation & Refinement

Prototyping & Testing

Ideation & Concept Development

sustainability practices (Figure 3). The Innovation Lab will provide opportunities for member collaboration to develop, test, evaluate and refine the next generation sustainability practices in these practice development areas.
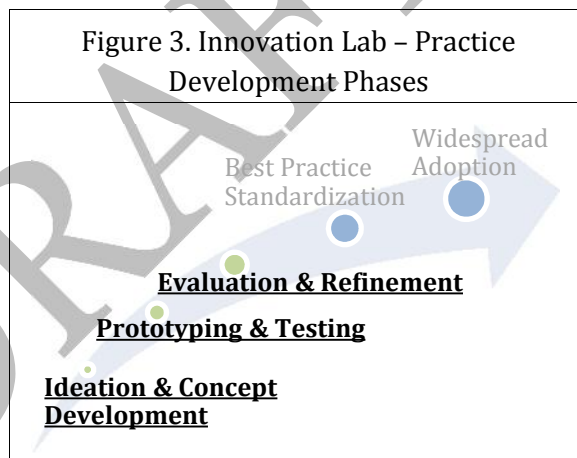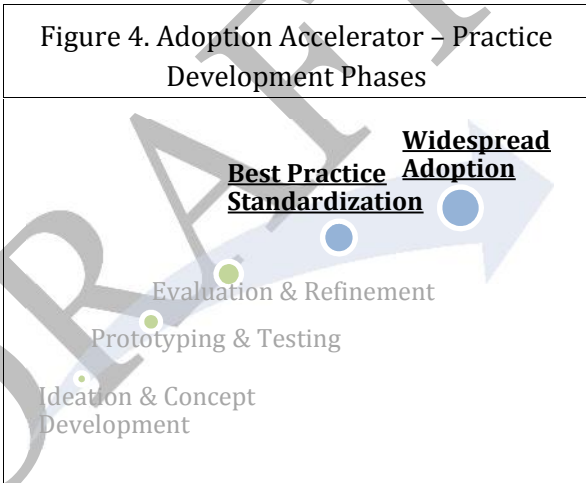
Goal 2 Strategies

2.1. **Create Innovation Work Groups around prioritized practice areas.** Innovation Work Groups will focus on ideas that are in the first three phases of practice development and have potential for high impact. Practice areas will be prioritized by members yet broad enough to cultivate exploration, and innovation. Groups will develop annual action plans and identify collaborative projects. USDN will establish relationships with strategic partners and funders to support Innovation Work Group activities.

2.2. **Focus Innovation Lab projects on idea creation, prototyping, and evaluation.** Evolve funding criteria to encourage projects that identify, pilot, and prototype the leading edge of sustainability practices.

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[3] For example, the 2015 Energy Transformation grant helped USDN member cities explore a new and important innovation, while the 2015 Mayor's Workplace Challenge allowed ten members to adopt a practice that was developed and proven by City of Nashville.

2.3. **Reposition and refocus the USDN Innovation Fund as a part of an integrated USDN investment strategy** that provides grant funding opportunities to support the USDN impact pathway. Prioritizes investment resources across all USDN funding mechanisms.

2.4. **Continue to support the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance** to provide leadership on innovative global best practices for deep GHG emissions reduction.

All of USDN's activities are ultimately in service to making an on-the-ground difference for local community sustainability. Yet, many factors influence a jurisdiction's ability to take action (political environment, resources, capacity, etc.). Demonstrating on-the-ground impact as a direct result of USDN activities is often challenging. Most members can anecdotally point to numerous ways in which USDN has advanced their local sustainability efforts, but aggregating and communicating those impacts at scale has proved challenging. After seven years of building the network, USDN is ready to experiment with a focused effort towards widespread implementation of sustainability practices.

Figure 4. Adoption Accelerator – Practice Development Phases

Widespread Adoption

Best Practice Standardization

Evaluation & Refinement

Prototyping & Testing

Ideation & Concept Development

The Adoption Accelerator will accelerate implementation of high-impact sustainability practices in U.S. and Canadian local governments through peer exchange, targeted technical assistance, collaborative projects, and implementation resources for member communities. The Adoption Accelerator will pick up where the Innovation Lab leaves off in the phases of practice development, focusing on best practice standardization and widespread adoption of high impact sustainability practices (Figure 4). This strategy will focus on a select number of high impact sustainability practices with the aim of catalyzing adoption in a significant number of USDN member communities.

USDN will select a specific, limited number of practices to support through its Adoption Accelerator activities. USDN will lead a process to identify approximately 15 distinct practices, which the network will aim to support accelerated implementation of during this 5-year period, with progress evaluated annually. Practices will be selected based on the following criteria (listed in order of priority): necessary foundational activities, potential for on-the-ground impact, member readiness, and partnership opportunity. USDN will set goals for the percentage of members implementing each practice, but will not require every member to implement any or all of the practices.

Goal 3 Strategies

3.1. **Conduct a High Impact Practices member survey building on the 2016 Member Impact Survey to inform selection of the Pathway's high impact practices.** This survey will assess

50-75 sustainability practices through multiple lenses such as: impact potential (foundational, on-the-ground impact), baseline implementation status (number of members that have implemented the practice, are preparing to implement the practice, or could implement the practice within three years), and potential for adoption (member readiness, partnerships, local political will), etc.

3.2. **Conduct a member-led process to identify up to 15 High Impact Sustainability Practices for prioritized support.** These practices will be the focus of USDN support to members in this Pathway and will be iteratively selected and evaluated by members. The purpose is to establish reasonable boundaries to test the network's ability to accelerate adoption of sustainability practices in member communities. USDN members represent a wide range of communities with differing contexts, paces for innovation, and potentials for adoption. Through this strategy, USDN intends to select a mixture of practices that maximize adoption potential in the wide range of member communities (large, small, vanguard, start up, etc.).

USDN will use a hybrid process to select these practices using direct member input through member surveys, committee input, expert advice, and all member voting. There will be approximately 15 high impact practices selected based on the following criteria:

Table 2. Illustrative Example of High Impact Practice Selection Criteria		
Criteria	**Guidelines & Key Questions**	**Possible Practice Examples**
Foundational Impact	Practices that communities need to lay the groundwork for a coordinated sustainability strategy or for other high-impact actions. *How does the practice help local government identify or prepare for actions that produce concrete results?*	Community Sustainability Plan, Climate Action Plan, 100% Renewable Energy Plan, Equity and Environment Initiative
On-the-Ground Impact	Practices that have measureable impacts such GHGs reduced, waste reduced, energy saved, stormwater managed, etc. *What are the demonstrable results of this action in other communities?*	Residential Rain Garden Program, Commercial Building Energy Upgrades, Energy Efficient Building Codes, Renewable Energy Programs
Member Readiness	Practices where it is likely 15% of member communities could take action over the next three years. *What percentage of members have already taken action? What is the timeline needed to implement? Is it something members can do within 1-3 years? What are the resources need to implement?*	LED Street Lighting Conversions, Equity Planning, Sustainable Consumption Policy, Battery Installation with Solar PV, Green Ribbon Commissions, Carbon Sequestration, District Scale Engagement

Partnership Opportunity	Practices where funders, nonprofits, or private businesses are interested catalyzing accelerated adoption. *Are investors (philanthropic, federal, etc.) interested in partnership to help members take action?* *Are nonprofits or businesses interested in strategic programmatic partnerships to help members take action?*	Energy Benchmarking & Public Disclosure (i.e., City Energy Project), Adaptation Planning, Municipal Building Energy Efficiency Projects, Climate Communications (Eco America)

3.3. **Establish adoption goals and shared metrics for High Impact Sustainability Practices.** The goal for the Adoption Accelerator is that many members will work towards adopting at least one High Impact Practice. All members will not be asked to adopt all High Impact Practices, but all members will be asked to pursue at least one over time. For each practice, USDN will define a reporting metric and set a target percentage for the increase in the number of members that have adopted it. Targets will be finalized after firm baseline figures are established. See illustrative examples of High Impact Practice goals in Table 2, with an example target of 15% for all actions.

	Table 3. Illustrative Example of Potential USDN Core Sustainability Practices			
	High Impact Practice Examples	**Metric**	**Baseline**	**2020 Target (15% increase)**
1	Conversion to LED streetlights	% of members with 100% conversion rates % of members with 50% conversion rates	1% 13%	16% 28%
2	Commercial food waste collection	% of members with +30% reduction rate % of members with 1-29% reduction rate	37% 19%	52% 34%
3	Complete streets policy	% of members with adopted complete streets policies	25%	40%
4	Community Sustainability Plan	% of members reporting a community carbon footprint reduction	29%	44%
5	Municipal Carbon Footprint Reduction Policy	% of members reporting a municipal carbon footprint reduction	43%	58%

3.4. **Create Adoption Accelerator Work Groups.** Adoption Accelerator Work Groups will focus on practices that are ready for adoption (e.g., having gone through the first three phases of practice development, either through USDN activities or otherwise) and have potential for high impact. Groups will foster peer exchange, develop annual action plans, and strive to identify collaborative projects. USDN will establish relationships with strategic partners and funders to support Adoption Accelerator Work Group activities. These partnerships could include working with clusters of members and private or philanthropic partners to aggregate a large scale implementation project or working with an academic partner to explore the implementation barriers and solutions to a specific practice in a cluster of communities.

3.5. **Make strategic investments to help large numbers of members advance implementation of prioritized actions.** USDN will support scaled adoption by making strategic investments to build member capacity and provide critical support to help members advance implementation. This may include delivering trainings, custom advising on priority actions, conducting feasibility studies, or other activities. These strategic investments may occur separate from member-generated proposals to the Accelerated Adoption Grants Program (see strategy 6 below). These activities may be delivered by USDN members, staff, or partners as appropriate through formats tailored to member needs. For example, USDN often coordinates intensive workshops directly before or after the annual meeting. Going forward, workshop preference will be given to topics that address a practice ready for adoption.

3.6. **Establish an Adoption Accelerator Grants Program.** USDN will also enable members to apply for resources where they have opportunities to collaborate to advance implementation of high-impact practices. These collaboration grants could be used for project management, as resources for each member to create an implementation plan, to conduct shovel readiness activities, and/or to evaluate post implementation in each community.

Example A: Three members work together to concurrently design, implement, and evaluate residential food waste collection pilot programs. Funding would support the pilot design and evaluation report.

Example B: Five members hire a central energy benchmarking helpline service to support compliance by private building owners, reducing the need for duplicative costly functions in each city.

3.7. **Establish an Adoption Accelerator Peer Learning Grant offering**. Incentivize collaborative learning to increase member readiness to implement high impact practices. Grants could support for convenings to learn from a leading community, or an expert to provide training about a high-impact practice for a group of members as they prepare for implementation, etc. USDN should allow partner regional networks to seek grant funding from this fund so long as the grant is led by USDN members.

An example from a past USDN grant is the LED streetlight convening in southeast Michigan. This convening brought together 3 USDN members and 21 other municipalities to learn about LED streetlight rates and implementation programs. This convening led to the creation of a 13-city consortium with the goal to transition Southeast Michigan to LED streetlights in about 5 years.

GOAL 4: ENHANCE NETWORK EFFECTIVENESS

Since its inception, USDN has been an informal "by, for, and of" network of members housed by a fiscal sponsor, Global Philanthropy Partnership, and supported primarily by philanthropic grants. It has invested heavily in building peer connectivity and members' levels of participation and satisfaction are consistently high. However, seven years in, the informal organizational structure and lack of diverse revenues has the potential to limit USDN's ability to continue to lead and grow.

This strategic plan will enhance the long-term sustainability and effectiveness of USDN by aligning USDN's organizational model, membership structure, and financial resources to advance the strategic plan goals and position USDN as a long-term leader in the field of urban sustainability.

<u>Goal 4 Strategies</u>

4.1. **Redesign the USDN membership structure to clarify eligibility, benefits, and requirements.** Key questions to resolve in the redesign include: membership participation and reporting requirements, membership tiers, county membership, and level of support for sustainability subject-matter specialists who are nominated by sustainability directors. Begin to include modest implementation requirements (i.e., all members' jurisdictions must work towards adopting at least one of the high impact practices identified for the Adoption Accelerator).

4.2. **Develop a multi-year funding plan anchored by a diversified revenue stream**. The funding plan should include a funder and partner revenue strategy, as well as a member contribution strategy that increases the amount contributed by members to core operating costs. Member-generated revenues could include increased dues, fees for specialist members, and/or additional annual meeting fees.

4.3. **Develop a common framework through which members are asked to report innovation and adoption efforts** to help the network prioritize, measure, and communicate its impact in local governments and on the field of urban sustainability. Consider leveraging existing frameworks such as the Leading Indicators set of ~20 performance metrics, which have been identified by a group of 16 USDN members and piloted by 34 members.

4.4. **Develop USDN-wide strategies for Investments, Partnerships, and Secondary Networks, to coordinate programs and investments across USDN's peer learning and innovation and impact.**

4.5. **Develop a formalized Partnership Strategy with a goal to engage external partners and communicate with external audiences** to leverage the collective ideas and influence of USDN to cultivate new opportunities to advance the work of members (e.g., shaping the work of external organizations, influencing policy and regulatory decisions).

4.6. **Work closely with key funders and partners to identify new resources** to support projects for high impact practice development and adoption by USDN members.

4.7. **Ensure equity, diversity, and inclusion throughout the work of the network.** USDN will seek to be a place where members and staff from diverse communities and life experiences come together and feel at home thanks to a culture of equity and inclusion. USDN will also continue to be a network of members that span the wide range from vanguard communities to communities progressing at a slower pace.

4.8. **Evaluate organizational structure options, including independent 501(c)3 status, and select and implement one for USDN going forward.** Align USDN staff and leadership

structures to support new organizational model. Establish formal policies for financial management, human resources, and other administrative functions.

4.9. **Develop performance measures across strategic plan goal areas** to assess USDN's impact on peer exchange, new practice development, and adoption of high impact practices in member communities.

4.10. **Produce an annual State of the Network report** to demonstrate progress on peer exchange, innovation, and accelerated adoption goals – with quantitative and qualitative data – to USDN members, funders, and potential partners.

VII. NEXT STEPS

USDN will aim to finalize this strategic plan by the end of 2016 after receiving member input before, during, and following the 2016 USDN Annual Meeting.

USDN will develop an associated implementation plan in 2017, addressing elements such as:

- Goal and strategy performance metrics
- USDN content boundaries
- Prioritization framework for selection of high impact practices to feature in Adoption Accelerator activities
- Investment, partnership, and secondary network strategies
- Evolving USDN organizational structure, staff roles, and funding plan
- Measurement and communication of performance and impact