SOUTHEAST SUSTAINABILITY DIRECTORS NETWORK

2019 Strategic Plan

Adopted January 2019

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Introduction

SSDN's Strategic Plan is designed to "connect the dots" at a high level between its desired goals and the resources, activities, and outputs needed to accomplish them. It is also designed to show how the networks goals are interrelated and build upon one another. Table I below is intended to convey that if SSDN is successful in **growing the field of municipal sustainability in the Southeast**, then it will continue to **build the capacity of municipal sustainability leaders** and **align them around shared goals and actions**, which in turn will encourage more communities in the region to adopt sustainable practices and continue to expand the field. These efforts are all supported by **maintaining a strong and thriving network**.

SSDN's Strategic Plan is also designed for ongoing evaluation and learning. After the planning process, SSDN will collect and analyze data, and reflect on its progress to determine how to improve the plan and associated activities. For this reason, the plan includes a high-level summary of what it hopes to achieve in terms of outcomes and outputs.

Foundation for Strategy

All strategies in this plan are guided by our vision, mission, theory of change and core values. The network's vision is the desired end state an organization wishes to create, its mission is the organization's fundamental purpose, and the theory of change is its overarching strategy for how and why desired change is expected to happen.

Vision
Local governments are continually integrating and institutionalizing sustainability best practices throughout all towns, cities, and counties in the Southeastern United States.

Mission
SSDN exists to accelerate and scale implementation of local government sustainability best practices in the Southeastern United States through a member led network of professionals who collaborate to solve problems, implement equitable solutions, and influence decision-makers.

Theory of Change
We believe that when networks of professionals are equipped with knowledge and skills and supported to collaboratively learn and experiment, then they can accelerate the field of practice toward scaled implementation and integration in all communities across the Southeast.

SSDN's Core Values

Our core values shape the work of our network, and guide our long-term vision and mission. These values also shape our members' work, and influence the way that they work in their communities. As our work together evolves over the years and as programs and practices shift, our core values shall guide the path and the continuous improvement of the network and its members. We value:
- Collaboration
- Authentic Relationships
- Transformation
- Diversity, Equity, Inclusion

Collaboration: Collaboration is the way we work. Collaboration fosters integration of our other core values into our work by allowing us to build and strengthen the network and our communities.

Authentic Relationships: We value relationships that are predicated on shared experiences that develop trust, honesty, integrity and authenticity.

Transformation: We support innovative efforts to transform the Southeast into a more sustainable, equitable and resilient region and adaptive to challenges caused by a changing climate.

Diversity: We believe that diversity of perspectives, experiences, backgrounds, and knowledge makes us stronger as an organization and as a field of practice.

Equity: We put equity at the forefront of all of our work, aligning our policies, practices, and resources so that all people have genuine opportunities to thrive.

Inclusion: We create an environment in which everyone feels valued and respected and is invited to participate.

Figure 1. SSDN's Core Values

Table I. SSDN Strategic Plan Summary

Foundation The structure upon which we advance change	**Maintaining a Strong Network** SSDN is a vehicle of change through building and maintaining a thriving organization rooted in the network model. Activities in this area include: ● SSDN will be geographically and demographically representative of our communities ● The network will revisit the network structure, management systems and policies, network impact and staffing to evolve as needed ● SSDN will establish and adopt financial goals ● The network will develop, adopt and implement a strategic communications plan and associated tools ● SSDN's foundational structure will be one built on values of diversity, equity and inclusion and will seek to build sustainability solutions for all in the South.		
Impact The change we want to accomplish	**Grow the Field** More communities commit to implementing sustainable solutions for all, with an emphasis on communities that have not historically pursued sustainable practices	**Build Capacity** Municipal sustainability leaders have the capacity to implement sustainability practices in their communities	**Align Practitioners** Regionally innovative practices are propelled toward scalable implementation as SSDN members share priorities for learning, collaborating, and implementing solutions in the region
Outcomes How participants benefit	**Outcomes** Municipal leaders in underrepresented states and communities have a pathway for advancing sustainability in their communities with access to support and resources.	**Outcomes** SSDN meets communities where they are by offering three capacity building tracks for beginner communities and advanced communities, non-members and members.	**Outcomes** Sustainability practitioners have built trusting relationships with one another and have access to shared best practices and implementation examples in the region.
Deliverables What we intend to deliver	**Deliverables** If we are successful, 2-4 new communities and new staff in existing communities advance to an SSDN capacity building track appropriate for that community each year.	**Deliverables** SSDN launches three capacity building tracks: ● "Mentorship Track" for new communities (2 new members annually) ● "Onboarding Track" for new staff in existing member communities ● "Full Member Track" for full member communities (2 new full members annually)	**Deliverables** Members to align around challenges, best practices, and widespread implementation. As a result, the deliverable is that SSDN members report high levels satisfaction reported by SSDN members on the member survey.
Activities How we plan to deliver it	**Activities** SSDN will conduct targeted outreach and other strategies to influence key decision makers in underrepresented states and communities. Key activities will include: ● Conducting targeted research and landscape assessments to better understand what communities need to advance and which partnerships will advance SSDN's goals ● Implement a pilot program to pursue key partnerships and provide access to trusted information to targeted communities to catalyze sustainability commitments	**Activities** SSDN will design three capacity building tracks for communities of different sizes and/or readiness levels for sustainability programs: Mentorship track, Onboarding track, Full Member track. Activities embedded in each track will include: ● Peer Learning ● Training & Technical Assistance ● Experiential Learning The design will consider how peer learning groups can support each track, and how activities are funded through fees and/or other sources of funding.	**Activities** SSDN will continue to support member-driven activities that result in alignment, including: ● Steering Committee ● Network Committees and Task Forces ● Member surveys ● Democratic decision making ● Work Groups ● Annual Meeting
Resources What we need to support the effort	**Resources** ● A membership strategy that establishes targets to ensure diverse geographic and demographic representation; criteria for targeted communities ● Targeted outreach and communications plan ● Resources (grants, technical assistance, relationships) to influence and support decision makers	**Resources** ● Design outreach, resources, and services for each capacity building track ● Strategic Communications Plan ● SSCF Grant Fund ● Scholarships	**Resources** ● Staff time and administration ● Consultant support as necessary ● Member feedback

Background and Methodology

SSDN is a peer learning and collaboration network of over 60 municipal sustainability program leaders in the Southeastern United States. In 2016, members created a strategic plan with four major elements: building member capacity, collaboration, influencing the region, and building a strong organization. Since that time, much has changed in the network including membership growth, the start of the Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund (SSCF), and staffing transitions. Amidst these changes, a question continues to emerge: *To what end are we collaborating and influencing the region*? To address the current landscape, the network launched a strategic planning process with Ullman Consulting to chart the path for the next three to five years. Key elements and deliverables of the process to date have included:

- [State of the Network Report (SOTN).](#) This report includes a network health assessment, a summary of Strategic Plans, a review of SSDN operations, and a series of strategic planning scenarios to guide the planning process.
- **Member Visioning Session.** A session during the annual meeting was dedicated to reviewing the SOTN report and seeking member input on which strategic planning scenario to pursue. The scenarios included: (1) revision and rethink the 2016 plan; (2) reaffirm and refine the 2016 plan, or (3) fast forward to start planning the work. Members clearly aligned in their desire to pursue option two. This session included 64 members.
- **Staff Workshop.** The consultant team and staff conducted an in-person workshop to review and discuss network theory of change and logic models.
- **Member Focus Group Session.** Two focus group webinars were conducted to develop the guiding frameworks in this plan. These focus groups included 24 members.
- **Stakeholder Interviews.** SSDN's Steering Committee conducted 30 interviews with partners and stakeholders throughout the region and across the field of practice to gather input on the draft strategic plan.
- **Steering Committee Workshop.** SSDN's Steering Committee held a two-day workshop to review the draft strategic plan and align around goals and strategies included in the final plan.
- **Strategic Communications Planning**. SSDN launched a strategic communications planning effort during this process to begin to understand needs and strategies for communications to key audiences. A session dedicated to strategic communications was included in the Steering Committee's workshop.

Guiding Frameworks

SSDN is building the municipal sustainability field in the South.

Field building is defined as acts of connecting fragmented actors in a given area of work to create an organized industry around an issue or challenge. Field evolution can be organized into different stages (Table II.). These stages are fundamentally sequential and generally evolve over long periods of time. Understanding where a field is in its stage of evolution informs the effective design of a field building strategy. It allows the organization to efficiently target its resources around efforts that will advance the field based on its current position in time.

Municipal sustainability on a national scale is transitioning from the innovating stage into the scaling implementation stage. In the Southeast, we believe **practitioners need to focus on scaling implementation of nationally recognized best practices and innovating with regional nuance to meet communities where they are**. Based on strategic analysis and member direction during focus groups, we will focus our regional field building strategy over the next five years on innovating regionalized approaches to nationally recognized best practices in order to scale implementation.

Table II. Stages of Field Building Evolution		
Stages	Field Building	Focus Group Preference
1	**Framing:** Conceptual framing and isolated practice examples.	**11.7%**
2	**Innovating:** Connecting innovators and fostering the proliferation of practices. Practices are fragmented and often considered "proprietary" and need to be tested among communities of innovators.	**57.7%**
3	**Scaling Implementation:** Alignment of practitioners around shared goals, best practice methods, tools, and identity; scaling practitioner ability and readiness to implement.	**65.4%**
4	**Standardizing:** Practices are highly standardized and incorporated into formal training and certification systems. Practices are considered "commodities." Reward systems reinforce desired behaviors.	**0.8%**
5	**Mainstreaming:** A field eventually becomes widely acknowledged and accepted. Contributions from this field inform and influence other fields of practice and decision-making of organizations outside of its field.	**0.4%**

What does scaling implementation mean?

Developing clarity around how we will innovate and scale implementation will ensure that our strategies, programs, services, and activities are aligned and lead toward impact. Table III shows four options that members considered during two focus group calls in June 2018. Members expressed interest in continuing with Option A, and expressed a desire for more information about Option C. Several members also expressed interest in Options B and D, so those options are included as strategies that support Options A and C. **To prioritize, this plan explores goals and strategies to pursue scaling implementation through Options A and C.**

Table III. How will we innovate and scale implementation?		
Options	Theory of this Change	Preference
A. Build member capacity to create regional innovations and effectively implement solutions.	If we support members creating regional solutions and deepens their knowledge, then members will be better prepared to implement effective and impactful solutions.	61.8%
B. Disseminate knowledge from members to non-members in the region.	A rising tide raises all ships. If we build member capacity to implement solutions AND disseminate this knowledge beyond members, then the whole region advances further faster.	17.82%
C. Grow the number of communities committing to sustainability solutions.	There will be a limit to how far A and B can scale because there is a limit to the number of communities already committed to sustainability. In order to widely scale implementation, we will need to catalyze commitments from new communities.	38.46%
D. Remove barriers to local government implementation by targeting state regulatory and policy change.	Many southeastern practitioners are limited in their ability to make change by barriers at the state and utility level. If we target change this arena, those communities can move further faster.	28.75%

Core Collaboration Concepts

Achieving system change through field building requires effective collaboration in ways that achieve both the self-interests of members and stakeholders and the interests of the collective field. Collaboration is about getting people to develop

trusting relationships so that they can align and work together to achieve broad system change. While the structure of complex collaborations may differ, the phases that lead to effective collaboration are generally constant.

Figure II illustrates this evolutionary pattern through a connect-to-align-to-produce sequence (or "CAP sequence"). As a group evolves through the phases, connectivity builds on and becomes more advanced than the previous phase, creating a pathway to alignment, collective action, and impact.
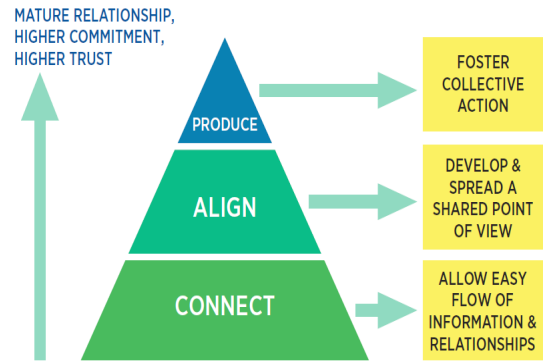
- **Connect:** People exchange information and build trust. They share knowledge, create new knowledge systems and resource channels, and develop understanding of systems targeted for change.
- **Align:** In the alignment phase, people apply their connections to discover, explore, and define the goals, strategies, and opportunities that they share. Connections deepen, and the opportunity to pursue collective action builds. The group aligns around common goals, values, and standards.
- **Produce:** People organize and implement collective projects. They engage in joint action for specific outcomes.

Figure II. SEQ Figure * ROMAN I Connect-Align-Produce Sequence

SSDN Goal and Strategy Detail

1. Grow the Field: More communities across the region commit to implementing sustainable solutions.

Desired Impacts: (1) Widespread adoption of best practices throughout member and nonmember communities; (2) An increased number and diversity of communities in the Southeast have knowledge of and access to best practices in urban sustainability and begin to pursue sustainable solutions.

We will inspire and support sustainability leadership in communities where we do not have strong member representation and where the network perceives sustainability efforts need support. We will go through a process to develop an adopted outreach and membership strategy to establish clear geographic and demographic diversity goals. We believe there is a limit to how far sustainability can scale in the region because there is a limited number of communities who are currently demonstrating sustainability leadership. Over the past five years, we have conducted direct outreach to dozens of communities in these geographies with limited results. Through this experience, members have observed that many of these communities do not have sustainability offices, programs, plans or policies. Growing the number of communities pursuing sustainable practices in these geographies is important for the field to continue evolving toward integrating sustainable best practices in all communities in the region.

To fulfill this goal, we will design a pilot program that seeks to encourage and support non-member communities to pursue sustainability practices. The main audience of this effort is envisioned primarily as City Managers and/or other management leaders (herein referred to as municipal decision makers) of thoughtfully selected communities that are viewed as promising candidates or transformational cities for eventual SSDN membership. The effort will also experiment with prioritizing outreach to Mayors of these communities. If we are successful in inspiring sustainability leadership, these communities can access capacity building activities that will continue to advance their progress through an appropriate track (see Goal 2). The target output is to reach 2-3 new communities each year and provide support so that those communities eventually advance to a capacity building stage.

1.1. Research & Discovery.

We will use access to existing survey data, interviews, and other materials to deepen its understanding of what targeted communities need in order to advance sustainability practices and launch a pilot period. Research will include a focus on members and non-members. By embarking on this discovery process, we will gain insight about regionally specific trends, insights, challenges, and innovations. We will use this insight to launch a pilot program.

Key Activities Include:
- **Landscape Assessment (Reaching Key Communities).** Compilation and synthesis of discovery on community needs guided by SSDN's target goals for geographic and demographic representation. The assessment will provide a "menu of options" for SSDN's outreach efforts in specific communities.

1.2. Build relationships and partnerships to grow the number of municipal champions for sustainability throughout the Southeast.

We will build relationships and partnerships with key municipal leaders to support municipal decision makers. We will also identify opportunities to establish partnerships with organizations working with municipal decision makers in the region to catalyze champions to pursue sustainability practices in their communities. Examples of these types of organizations include: The International City/County Management Association (ICMA), Metro Mayors Coalitions and/or Leagues of Cities, and other established Southeastern organizations advancing sustainability.

We understand that influencing city management and elected officials is outside of the network's current core competency and experience. Furthermore, network members are public servants who typically do not intervene directly within the political realm of municipal leadership. With this understanding, we will carefully and thoughtfully spend time learning how the network can leverage its unique value to support municipal decision makers. With an approach directed at specific communities, this may look like offering customized ideas, relationship building, and offering support and resources to support sustainability implementation based on local context.

Key Activities:
- **Pilot Period:** Test the feasibility of building relationships and potential partnerships with individuals and organizations working with municipal decision makers in the region.
- **Strategic advice to partners:** We may serve as advisors to partners that work with municipal decision makers.

1.3. Disseminate knowledge and information outside of the network.

We will share data, lessons learned, regional innovations, and regional best practices with nonmember communities and strategic partners. Currently, much of the information about sustainability comes from and is about communities from outside of the Southeast. Municipal decision makers need data and examples from within the region to understand opportunities and challenges to championing sustainability. Furthermore, creating and sharing this information offers value as the network builds relationships with communities outside of the membership and strategic partners.

Key Activities:
- **Communications Tools:** Update current communication tools (i.e. SSDN's website, newsletters, press releases, etc.) to be directed more pointedly to these key audiences.
- **Disseminate communication materials according to Strategic Communications Plan:** Materials will be designed and shared with a broader audience, outside of members.

2. Build Capacity: Municipal sustainability leaders have the capacity to successfully implement regional best practices.

Municipal sustainability leaders need to grow their knowledge, learn additional skills, improve their planning, and become more effective in their roles as community leaders. Table IV. provides a capacity building framework that outlines how we will to guide the achievement of this goal through three capacity building tracks targeted at specific audiences (new communities, new staff and/or staff with a different technical focus, and full members). We will design capacity building tracks to support members and nonmembers at different levels of commitment and experience. As a result, we will also build capacity of communities across the region in support of building the field of practice in the Southeast.

Desired Impact: Practitioners have access to proven strategies, support, knowledge, and skills to implement and evolve practices in their communities with greater consistency and impact.

Table IV. Capacity Building Framework[1]		
Who	**What**	**How**
Mentorship Track ● New communities considering sustainable practices	Learning Mentorship Training	Access to Annual Meeting via Scholarship Access to trusted information and resources Access to Peer Learning Workgroups Ability to apply to SSCF Cohort calls twice a year Other customized initiatives that may help a community onboard into more advanced practices and membership
Onboarding Track ● New or junior staff or staff from other technical areas within existing member communities "onboarding" into sustainability efforts	Learning Access to selected mentorship programs	Paid access to Annual Meeting (secondary members only) Access to trusted information and resources Access to Peer Learning Workgroups Cohort calls twice a year
Full Membership Track ● Existing SSDN Members	Planning Knowledge Skills Effectiveness	Access to Annual Meeting at no charge Peer Learning Training and Technical assistance Experiential learning

To offer capacity building opportunities to non-member communities, the Steering Committee will take an active role in targeting and selecting communities that are optimal for the Mentorship Track. In addition, our Strategic Communications Plan will help inform how to best reach target audiences in different tracks.

2.1. Peer Learning.

We will build member connectivity, trust, and knowledge through peer learning activities. There is a wealth of knowledge among practitioners within the region, and we will foster the sharing of that information to accelerate the spreading of ideas. Building connectivity and trust through this process is important so peer learning does not just focus on press release-style success stories, but also affords peers to learn about challenges and failures as well. Peer learning can take on many forms (see Key Activities below), but ultimately needs to provide value to members in order for them to prioritize participating in the network. To understand what value members desire from peer learning, we look to the

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[1]Adapted from http://www.tccgrp.com/pdfs/11-18-14_TCC_Capacity_3.pdf

"Top Member Value Propositions Over Time" in Figure III. Since 2013, members have prioritized six things from their participation in the network, including:

- Having access to trusted information about urban sustainability issues, models, solutions, etc.;
- Getting to know colleagues with which they can share information and experiences;
- Keeping abreast of what other communities are accomplishing;
- Networking with other sustainability directors at a state or national level;
- Participating in peer to peer learning processes, and;
- Building skills and knowledge through technical assistance or training.

Providing this value ensures members time in the network is well spent and inspires participation and contributions.

Figure III. Top Member Value Propositions Over Time[2]
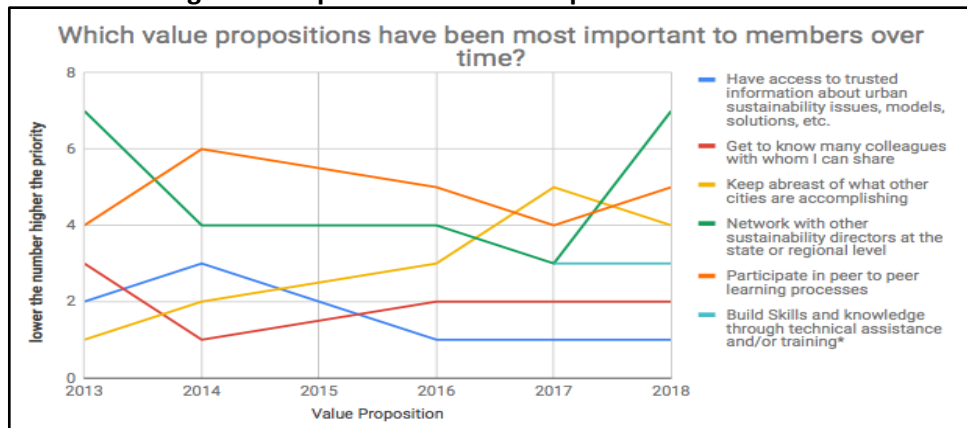
Key Activities:

- **Annual Member Meeting:** Member-only meetings focus on building trust, connections, and peer learning. Explore how to appropriately integrate training and technical assistance (see Strategy 2.2) and revisit sponsorship guidelines to ensure a safe space for candor (see Strategy 4.3).
- **Peer Learning Work Groups Calls:** Peers connect and share knowledge about specific topics and activities through conferences calls. Work groups are always member driven but may include outside technical assistance providers if requested by members. For example, when a group of members can no longer find a group of peers that can provide insights, they may seek outside assistance for that technical knowledge.
- **State Networks (NEW):** Conversations driven by members from the same state are demonstrating value among those who seek to understand opportunities for collaborative work on policy and/or projects that have implications on increasing sustainability efforts at the state level. Calls focus on peer exchange, but can also include outside experts who can provide technical assistance and other resources as requested by members.
- **Peer Coaching Charrettes (NEW):** These charrettes will include one or two conversations during which a member presents a challenge or draft design for an effort they are leading and they receive direct coaching and input from one member or a small group of members. This activity could also include a site visit as a follow up.
- **Communications:** Newsletter, press releases, website, stories, and case studies, social media, etc. will focus on sharing Southeastern community stories, highlighting successes in regional sustainability, and profiling members.

2.1. Training and Technical Assistance.

We will coordinate trainings and offer technical assistance about topics that are outside of the expertise of the membership. Over time members have found that peer learning can be limited when a topic area advances beyond the experience of peers in the region. Furthermore, members no longer want to move at the pace of their own experience but want to accelerate their learning by seeking expert knowledge and skills through training and technical assistance opportunities. The key difference between training and technical assistance is the former focuses on teaching knowledge

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[2] Build skills and knowledge through technical assistance and/or training was added as an option in 2017.

and the latter focuses on supporting practitioners to successfully apply knowledge. To address this in past years, members have experimented with training opportunities for climate adaptation planning and equity and energy efficiency offered in conjunction with annual meetings. In the future, we will expand offerings like these.

Key Activities:
- **Deep Dive Workshops.** A deep dive workshop is a convening focused on a topic that is explored through providing training and/or technical assistance elements so that members develop new skills, and learn how to apply that knowledge to a project or program. These groups are always member driven and may include nonmembers, like applicants and/or grantees of the SSCF.
- **Innovation Learning Circles.** Members receiving training and/or technical assistance over time (ex. 6-8 months) to build capacity and pave the way for implementation of a regionally innovative topic. Typically, these groups will function around a specific topic, sometimes in-person meetings and are co-facilitated by outside TA partners.
- **Equity Trainings:** Training for members and SSDN leadership that allows for a foundation of understanding of equity and how to apply it to their work. This could include training in person or online.
- **Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund Technical Assistance.** This training and technical assistance includes calls, emails or other types of support to improve the quality of SSCF applicants and to support grantees to design and implement their projects more effectively.
- **Training Scholarships.** We will experiment with offering competitive scholarships for members to cover registration costs of attending technical trainings conducted by outside partners.

2.2. Experiential Learning.

SSDN will accelerate experiential learning in the region by coordinating opportunities for practitioners to "learn while doing" to enhance and complement peer learning and training. Southeastern communities are historically and chronically under-resourced in municipal budgets, capital spending, and access to philanthropic or corporate resources. Local sustainability efforts need access to funding opportunities that acknowledge regional context to fuel experiential learning. This will strengthen network capacity building efforts by enabling practitioners to directly apply the knowledge and skills they are learning through the network.

Key Activities May Include:
- **Southeast Sustainable Communities Fund (SSCF)**. SSCF is the flagship program SSDN will use to implement the experiential learning. The SSCF is a grant program that annually funds collaborative projects that implement sustainable and equitable projects in their communities. This program is available to members and nonmembers (see Strategy 3.2 for more detail).
- **Collective Action Work Groups.** Historically, the network also supported experiential learning through projects where members collaborated to learn and implement solutions together. These efforts have been called many things over the lifespan of the network including Collaboration Work Groups, Innovation Projects, Innovation Fund Grants. Moving forward efforts of this type will be referred to as Collective Action Work Groups. The network will continue to support member lead collaborations to implement projects, but with less emphasis on this activity compared to the SSCF program within the strategy area.
- **Sustainability Fellows Program.** SSDN will experiment with offering a program where members apply for resources to hire a six month to a year paid fellow who will be embedded in their office and work on sustainability and/or equity projects. This program may be fully developed within SSDN or offered through a partnership with another organization with existing experience and strong mission orientation to building capacity of emerging professionals. A model to consider when experimenting with this idea is Civic Spark, a partnership program between Local Government Commission, California Office of Planning and Research, and California Volunteers. Other partnership opportunities for development and implementation of this program include the National League of Cities.

3. Align practitioners and communities around innovative priorities and a shared understanding of regional and national best practices.

Practitioners need to align so the field can move from having independent problem solvers to clusters of people working together. The CAP Sequence (Figure I.) details the essential step between practitioners connecting with each other and collaboratively producing results together - alignment. We will align clusters of practitioners around shared priorities for regional innovation as well as aligning consensus around what practices are best practices in the region. As a Regional Network of USDN, we will align around appropriate national best practices that demonstrate high impact in addressing impacts of climate change. It is important to align around a shared understanding of what regional best practices look like so that other municipalities who may not have the bandwidth or support to participate in innovation can quickly learn from their peers about what works best in the south and start their work implementing tried and true practices.

Desired Impact: When alignment is achieved, members share priorities for learning, collaborating, and implementing, which will scale implementation of regionally innovative practices, and thus evolve the field in the Southeast.

2.3. Member driven decision making.

Decision making around network priorities will be done inclusively and democratically. A decentralized decision-making structure is important because it provides an inclusive process for members to align ideas about challenges and opportunities. This alignment cultivates forward progress among collaboratives of practitioners. Furthermore, inclusive decision making fosters a greater sense of ownership and participation from members, which is essential for a collaboration network whose success is dependent upon the volunteerism of the membership.

Key Activities:
- **Steering Committee.** The SSDN Steering Committee is made of members, led by members, and coordinated by staff, serves as the "board of directors" role and drives the network's growth and strategy development. All members are eligible to serve in the Steering Committee.
- **Network Committees.** In addition to the Steering Committee, members will provide strategic direction to the network through committees such as the Annual Meeting Committee, Membership Committee, Grants Committee, Communications Committee and ad hoc committees to address topics as different needs arise.
- **Member Surveys.** Surveys include, but are not limited to, the Annual Meeting survey and the Member Impact survey. Surveys are important to assess shared priorities and set agendas for member activities.
- **Democratic Decision Making.** A dot voting process takes place during the annual meeting for members to choose topics for peer learning, innovation learning circles, work plans and work group topics for the following year.

4. Strong Organization: SSDN supports members by building and maintaining a thriving organization.

We will be recognized as a national leader in sustainability field building through exemplary management, operations, and financial health. We will also build a strong foundation through honoring the need for diversity, equity and inclusion to be at the core of the network's operations, management and leadership, and integrated into the network's core program development. As we advance and implements this plan, organizational support systems will also advance.

4.1. Establish financial plans and targets.

We will establish financial targets and goals for revenue to steward the financial sustainability of the organization. We have seen tremendous financial growth since the 2016 strategic plan was created. Starting in 2017, re-granting programs

brought over $750,000 in grant funds to the network each year. Operations funding jumped from just over $90,000 in 2016 to nearly $300,000, and today's total estimated budget is just over $2,000,000. Alongside our grant program came the opportunity to grow internal operations in support of the growing network that that need will continue to grow over time. Proposed goals include: (1) Earned Program Revenue Percentage: 15% of operations funding is earned through sources outside of philanthropic grants. (2) Operations Reserve: three months of operations funding is available in a reserve budget in case of financial emergency.

Key Activities:
- **Adopt financial goals:** A committee of members will propose targets and make a recommendation for adoption.
- **Increase member dues**: In 2020 or 2021, increase SSDN's dues to reflect additional costs for member benefits.
- **Further align current foundation support and develop new funding relationships for network operations:** Engage current funders to bring new foundations on board to support general network operations, maintain new programs, and offer new capacity building activities for members.

4.2. Evaluate the most effective option for SSDN's business structure including fiscal sponsorship and staffing models.

We will explore its business structure to determine the most effective design. We have had three fiscal sponsors to date. We chose our current fiscal sponsor, Global Philanthropy Partnership, because they serve as USDN's fiscal sponsor. In 2019 USDN will become a 501 C3 nonprofit and will offer fiscal sponsorship service to Regional Networks. We will work with the Steering Committee to evaluate the best model and approach for SSDN's organizational structure.

Key Activities:
- **Explore options for SSDN's organizational structure.** Options include maintaining the current fiscal sponsorship, moving to another fiscal sponsor, or becoming a stand-alone non-profit organization.
- **Update network staffing approach.** Moving forward, the network will transition to employed staff and increase the amount of staff in order to improve commitment, accountability, and delivery of this strategic plan. SSDN has functioned with part time consultant support in lieu of employed staff since the origins of the network. 2018 marks a milestone year with the amount of contract consultant time tipping just over the amount of time a full-time employee would provide. SSDN will explore the optimal staffing model for continued growth in operations.

4.3. Revisit network management systems and policies to evolve as needed.

In the early years, members led processes to establish important guidance for network policy and programs for example, membership requirements and growth targets. It will benefit the network to refresh any policies that are outdated or were created in a narrow context to best institutionalize member direction from the past as the network moves forward.

Key Activities:
- **Formalize annual budget and work planning processes.** Budget creation and work planning has largely been conducted informally and incrementally as each year moves on. Going forward we will create a more structured system with clear and consistent processes for the Steering Committee to inform and guide.
- **Update and adopt the strategic communications plan.** Revisit the member created communication plan with expert consultant support to guide short and long-term communication activity with target our audiences.
- **Adopt explicit network operating principles and formalize the network's commitment to pursuing equity as an integral component of sustainability**. How the network works to implement this strategic plan is very important to its success. Many members could state the implicit values they share as they lead this network (e.g. reciprocity, collaboration, iteration etc.), but it is important to make this implicit understanding explicit and transparent for both veteran members and new members by writing a network core values statement.

4.5. Regularly evaluate impact of network

We will evaluate member satisfaction and impact to iteratively inform continuous improvement. While we implement some measurement tools now, the network desires to create formal evaluation methods and tools to assess network activities and program impact. Through this strategy we will establish a system to understand long-term opportunities for success of the network's programs and internal infrastructure and give network leaders the tools to make needed changes.

Key Activities:
- **Formalize network impact evaluation.** Engage in assessing all current evaluation systems for the network and its activities and create one system to evaluate network impact moving forward.
- **Communicate network impact**. To maximize effectiveness of the SSDN's work and drive change, communicating about the network's impact will be an important part of each year's communications goals.