

Regional Models of Cooperation Case Study Series

New Hampshire's Planning Commissions Develop Joint Statewide Strategy

The differences among rural, suburban, and urban communities can be stark, making statewide planning challenging. Although New Hampshire has a population of about 1.3 million people, the communities spread throughout its nine planning regions are diverse. To integrate planning efforts throughout the State, the State's nine regional planning commissions (RPCs) worked together on [Granite State Future](#), the State's largest visioning, regional planning, and public involvement campaign to date.

Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

New Hampshire law requires the State's nine RPCs to develop comprehensive regional plans. While the nine RPC directors meet monthly to coordinate their work, it is a challenge for regions to coordinate their planning efforts to get an overall picture of New Hampshire's future. When the Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) volunteered to pursue a substantial U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grant, the other eight RPCs agreed to support NRPC. The RPCs decided that competing locally for federal funding would not be advantageous if none of them were awarded funds, and that working together could benefit everyone involved.

In its first attempt, NRPC submitted an application on behalf of the State's RPCs for a 2010 HUD grant, but did not receive funding. In 2011, the consortium applied again and was awarded \$3,369,648 to implement Granite State Future, a three-year, community-based public dialogue about what New Hampshire residents wanted for the future of their communities. The program will culminate in updates to each of the nine RPCs' regional plans in December 2014.

Collaboration Structure

Once the grant was awarded, NRPC took the lead on organizing the program and ensuring that the RPCs and their constituents participated in the effort. The consortium's first task was to develop integrated marketing products, encompassing common language and messaging, as well as a website and logo. This communications framework was designed to guarantee that the RPCs would communicate the same basic information from a consistent, shared voice throughout the program.

Granite State Future was organized into three phases: Years one and two focused on engaging citizens and leaders through a broad visioning process, followed by local working sessions that focused on specific areas of local interest. In year two, each region conducted a regional needs assessment to set goals and priorities and developed components of the regional plan, and in year three each region reviewed the plan. The RPCs are now in the process of finalizing their plans and beginning implementation of specific tasks.

Collaboration between the agencies and stakeholders was evident from the start of Granite State Future. In the second year, each RPC worked individually with its own communities, and then reconvened at the beginning of year three to discuss common ideas, themes, and goals. Project managers at each of the RPCs met monthly to



work on product and plan development, and a statewide advisory committee met quarterly to ensure that each RPC was on schedule.

Technical advisory subcommittees comprised of subject matter experts assembled and met as needed to work through issues and share solutions among the RPC staff throughout the State. A working documents site was developed that allowed staff to communicate and share information, including data, methodologies, and lessons learned. This reduced the risk of duplicating efforts within and among the RPCs, saving both time and money.

In addition to establishing several levels of coordination among the RPCs, NRPC coordinated project work with four different departments at the University of New Hampshire (UNH) and with more than 100 local partners. UNH's Carsey Institute helped to educate the regions about how to conduct equitable public outreach. The university also assisted with a statewide telephone survey, conducted climate impact assessments, and provided GIS data support.

The RPCs also developed an implementation matrix that allows them to compare the implementation actions each RPC is promoting for the future and rank them (as high, medium, or low) as the strategies are rolled out.

Collaboration Accomplishments

As Granite State Future affects the future of the entire state of New Hampshire, the RPCs have had the opportunity to work with organizations that have similar statewide goals. These partnerships had not been possible or successful previously, as each RPC tended to focus on its individual region rather than the needs of the entire state. Partners such as the New Hampshire AARP chapter and NH Listens have been supportive of the program and will continue to work with the RPCs once Granite State Future concludes in 2014.

As a result of the largest public engagement effort in New Hampshire history, the regions and their residents now have a better understanding of the attributes and interests of their neighbors throughout the State. The RPCs also have data to support their decisions, which will help when plan implementation begins in each region.

The RPCs plan to present products developed during the Granite State Future program to the governor and the State Office of Energy and Planning as resources that they can utilize for their own initiatives.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

Given the length of the project timeline and the sheer number of stakeholders involved, it was inevitable that some momentum was lost, particularly during year two when each RPC worked mostly within its own region. From working with partners that did not share common planning backgrounds, the RPCs also discovered that it was important to minimize planning jargon and to be open to feedback from a variety of perspectives. Many individuals throughout the State were initially skeptical of a statewide, sustainable planning effort and opposed Granite State Future. Throughout the program, the RPCs listened to stakeholders' concerns and were able to deliver stronger, more tenable products as a result.

The Granite State Future program galvanized local communities throughout New Hampshire to be active participants in planning for their futures, offering fresh perspectives and additional reasons for the RPCs to collaborate. By working together on a common program, the RPCs were able to share a new source of federal funding, save time and money, and perhaps most importantly, benefit the communities that they serve.

