

San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process

Regional Models of Cooperation Case Study Series

A Shared Vision and Tailored Programs Benefit Entire San Joaquin Valley

A number of significant challenges were facing the San Joaquin Valley, including population growth, rising poverty, poor air quality, and aging infrastructure. Local agencies determined the best way to manage these issues was to approach them as a region, rather than a series of isolated communities. As a result of a region-wide vision and tailored, community-focused implementation programs, the San Joaquin Valley has secured funding and implemented programs that are managing for population changes, rebuilding infrastructure, and improving health outcomes.



Logos for Smart Valley Places and Blueprint Integration Project

Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

In 2006, the San Joaquin Valley in California embarked on a valley-wide effort to develop a long-range vision for the region's future growth, called the [San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process](#). The eight Valley planning organizations—one regional transportation planning authority (RTPA) and seven councils of government (COGs)—formed the [San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Council](#) (SJVRPC) partnership and worked together to create and oversee valley-wide projects that resulted from this process.

Following the planning process, in 2009 the SJVRPC adopted a planning scenario and 12 Smart Growth principles for the region. The SJVRPC realized that the new planning scenario and principles could not be implemented effectively across the region's diverse communities with one strategy, so they established a two-pronged approach.

The [Blueprint Integration Project](#) (BIP) was developed to help rural and agricultural Valley communities with 50,000 or fewer residents implement the Blueprint Planning Process goals and objectives. The [Smart Valley Places](#) (SVP) program was created to help urbanized metropolitan areas with more than 50,000 residents to do the same.

Collaboration Structure

Each program worked toward the same regional vision established by the Blueprint Planning Process, and staff on each project consistently worked together on processes and products to support implementation. Each program's funding sources and organizational structures, however, differed in several ways.

SVP received a \$4 million regional planning grant from the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities program in 2010 and distributed \$200,000 to each of its 14 cities to implement a project centered on the Blueprint smart growth principles, such as creating a climate action plan or conducting a watershed study. A group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) received funding to conduct outreach and leadership programs among



traditionally marginalized communities, and a portion of funding was set aside for outreach to elected officials, to develop a regional hub online, and to host regional quarterly meetings.

Instead of distributing money for specific community-level projects, BIP worked with its 46 communities to provide general planning assistance. Using \$500,000 in state funding, BIP determined which planning resources were most needed among the communities and developed the [Blueprint Planner's Toolkit](#). The Toolkit is an online “educational guide and reference source for communities who want to translate the 12 Blueprint Smart Growth Principles into action” and includes resources and templates to help small communities update their general plans, change zoning ordinances to allow for mixed-use developments, and implement new design criteria.

Though SVP and BIP were ultimately separate programs, they have worked together toward the same regional goals established by the Blueprint Planning Process. To ensure that everyone in the region was aligned on the ultimate objectives, SVP hosted a regional planning convention where both urban and rural projects in the region were showcased and discussed.

Both programs also conducted quarterly calls and several forums throughout the year where communities shared planning best practices and lessons learned. The annual SJVRPC policy conference also promoted this collaborative work through the popular [Blueprint Awards Program](#).

Collaboration Accomplishments

The SVP and BIP grants concluded in 2014, but their names and activities continue to have an impact on Valley communities. Communities throughout the Valley have realized the benefits of working together through idea-sharing; they have taken solutions to problems encountered by other Valley communities and applied them to their own communities’ problems.

Now that the lines of communication are open, agencies are providing feedback on needs as they arise and leverage shared resources available through the partnership. The Blueprint Planner’s Toolkit hosts a variety of tools and templates that local agencies can use for either basic or tailored approaches for projects in their communities.

BIP also assembled a group of circuit planners who travel throughout the Valley working with communities to create planning templates for communities that lack the staff and resources to produce themselves. This roving planner program has become so popular that contracts have been created for individuals to fulfill these roles year-round.

In addition to local agency participation, elected officials, the public, and non-governmental organizations were involved in the SVP and BIP programs. Ongoing communications with these groups built name recognition for the Blueprint Planning Process and created goodwill towards the resulting collaborative work. Easy-to-understand, consumer-facing documents, such as the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Roadmap, were popular not only in the Valley but with planning organizations in other regions throughout the U.S.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

San Joaquin Valley is comprised of 8 counties stretching 27,000 square miles in area, with a 4-hour drive from end-to-end. Geographic distribution was a challenge, both in terms of urban and rural differences, as well as



sheer size of the region. Project support, especially for SVP, was based at Fresno State University, which some communities felt was too far away. Taking all communities' perspectives and situations into account is important when working on region-wide initiatives, as is being open and upfront about how geographic constraints will be managed. Region-wide events and conference calls helped individuals build trust with one another and collaborate on similar problems across agencies and jurisdictional boundaries.

Partnering with a university is also a useful way to unite various organizations and to facilitate collaboration among them. Fresno State served as a regional convener for SVP during implementation, and it will continue to host the Blueprint Planner's Toolkit and seek new funding sources for future regional planning programs.

Flexibility with funding is also important to consider, especially during the grant application and planning phases. Setting aside money to respond to new situations and priorities during the implementation phase allows programs to adapt to changing needs while still meeting program goals.

The products and relationships created by this collaboration will continue in future regional efforts. Through patience, trust, and open dialogue, the results of this collaboration proved that it is possible for a geographically large, diverse, and populous area to successfully identify, work toward, and achieve common goals.

