

EDC Locally Administered Federal-Aid Projects

Stakeholder Partnering



PROGRAM CASE STUDY

This Program Case Study highlights Virginia's efforts to use Stakeholder Partnering as a platform for communication, coordination, and cooperation in streamlining and improving project delivery and compliance. This is just one example of how stakeholder partnering can operate within the realm of possibilities for each state. It is meant as an aid to those who are refining similar activities or enhancing existing programs.



Virginia's Stakeholder Partnering Groups

The Virginia Department of Transportation's (VDOT's) stakeholder partnering efforts span more than 10 years and include several different groups associated with local programs. These mutually supportive partnerships allow members to get to know and become resources for each other, to discuss and identify issues, and to work on solutions as a team. The collaboration has produced benefits for all involved, from the localities, to VDOT, to Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) staff.

Virginia's Stakeholder Partnering Model

VDOT's statewide partnering efforts began following a change in the Virginia State Code in 2003. The Department was formerly obligated to manage all state and federally funded transportation projects on all streets in the state's localities with the exception of two counties; however, in 2003 certain municipalities were provided the option to take over the entire construction program within their jurisdictions.

VDOT formed a stakeholder partnership with the localities that opted in to the new program, called the Urban Construction Initiative (UCI) Group, so that they could work on the issues inherent in taking over this responsibility. There were three localities that joined initially, and that number has since grown to 14. Members of the UCI Group manage federal and state projects under a programmatic agreement, while other Virginia localities administer them on a case-by-case basis under project-specific agreements with the state.

BENEFITS OF VIRGINIA'S STAKEHOLDER PARTNERING EFFORTS

Communication	Coordination	Cooperation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnering provides an opportunity to discuss and identify issues together then work on solutions as a team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> VDOT benefits from the localities' feedback in aligning goals with stakeholder needs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Localities get to know each other, become resources for each other, and stay informed.

This partnering effort with the UCI Group includes project support, managerial and executive staff from the localities and similar staff from VDOT Districts. Within this larger group is a smaller group of volunteers called the UCI Workgroup, which includes staff from roughly half the UCI Group member localities, some District offices, and an FHWA representative.

"This is the group that gets the work done," said Russ Dudley, the Assistant Division Administrator for VDOT's Local Assistance Division. "The Workgroup decides which initiatives to focus on, and then we present those at our larger UCI Group meetings each year to get the other members' buy-in on what we are doing and where we are headed."

The Workgroup meets every other month, keeping a running list of about 10 items that they work on to help improve VDOT's local program. Each item is assigned task leads, typically one locality person and one VDOT person.

The Workgroup also manages an annual UCI Group satisfaction survey, which they use to gauge the localities' relationships with VDOT, whether they are headed in the right direction, or if there are issues that need to be addressed. The Workgroup also develops agendas for the main UCI Group's meetings.

The main UCI Group started with four meetings per year, but as the program matured, they reduced the number to two. One of these is a one-day meeting with technical sessions and business discussions. The other is what they call their annual meeting, which lasts two days. The first day is dedicated to training. The Workgroup determines the topic for the training, and VDOT brings in the subject matter specialists to conduct it. The second day is their business day, which is used to discuss impacts to their programs such as new state or federal legislation, or new initiatives like Every Day Counts.

"This is their group and we let them, as much as possible, tell us what they want the group to be, how they want it to work, and what they want to get out of it," said Dudley.

Following on the success of the UCI Group, VDOT's Local Assistance Division started another partnering effort in 2012. This new group, the Local Stakeholder

Keys to Success

- ▶ Use facilitators to manage meetings.
- ▶ Be responsive to member input and suggestions.
- ▶ Conduct an annual satisfaction survey to gauge relationships
- ▶ Keep group size manageable but make sure to have adequate representation

Partnering Group, was assembled to provide a venue for gaining more local input into the Division's programs, to ensure the Division's efforts align with the actual needs and concerns of the local governments in administering projects, and to gather input for major initiatives.

The Local Stakeholder Partnering Group includes representatives from 13 localities and an FHWA representative.

"In creating the group, we wanted to keep the size workable but also include a good variety of representation of towns and counties in terms of geography, size and population," said Dudley. "So far, the group has had three meetings and we have identified general items to look at from a program perspective, such as consistency in implementing the local programs manual across districts. They are currently deciding what their goals are, and whether they will serve in an advisory or working group type of capacity."

VDOT's Local Assistance Division has also been tasked with forming a District Group, which will be made up of VDOT district staff who work with localities and will operate parallel to the Local Stakeholder Partnering Group. They will then create a subgroup made up of members of both. The subgroup will identify and prioritize strategies for improving the local agency program in general.

"The subgroup has a very specific task: to identify strategies and improve the program," said Dudley. "We may dissolve the subgroup after we finish this task, or we may keep the group together and meet

UCI Group Accomplishments:

Initiated a UCI Certification Program.

- *One of the values of stakeholder partnering is that it can launch other initiatives, including certification. The UCI Group initiated a certification program with VDOT for member localities that wanted additional streamlining abilities.*

Created a Project Development Review Timeline.

- *The UCI Workgroup created a project development timeline with a list of steps and reviews involved, according to funding type, so that localities can integrate those activities and durations into their project scheduling and develop realistic timeframes.*

Streamlined the Sole Source and Proprietary Projects Process.

- *The UCI Group suggested that VDOT take advantage of a federal regulation allowing certification for some proprietary or sole source items that meet certain conditions, rather than treating all items at the higher Public Interest Findings level. VDOT is currently implementing the suggestion, which will result in significant time savings for the locals, VDOT and FHWA.*

once a year to possibly revisit the strategies and determine if they are still valid, whether we have gotten where we need to be, and if we are headed in the right direction.”

There is a small amount of overlap between the two localities groups, with two UCI Group members also serving in the Local Stakeholder Partnering Group.

“We did this to get some cross-fertilization on topics,” said Dudley. “We reached out to those two folks and asked them to do this. For them, it is two extra meetings per year, because right now that is how often the local group plans to meet.”

The District VDOT group used video conferencing to conduct their kickoff meeting, and their first face-to-face meeting is scheduled for October 2014, following the Local Assistance Division’s Annual Workshop. VDOT plans to have the subgroup formed and ready to talk about strategies by early 2015.

Program Challenges and Solutions

One challenge in administering the stakeholder partnering groups is allocating time for additional responsibilities within the Local Assistance Division. Dudley is currently managing the Local Stakeholder Partnering Group, and another member of the Division staff manages the UCI Group.

“We are a small group, and this does take a lot of time,” said Dudley, “but we think the partnering is pretty important to keep our goals focused and to know what is important.”

Another issue present when diverse groups work together is meeting management. Dudley noted that some VDOT staff has had facilitation training, and that it is very helpful in keeping the meetings on track. VDOT brought in a professional facilitator for the Local Stakeholder Partnering Group kickoff meeting.

“We had a great kickoff meeting,” said Dudley. “With the facilitator present, our staff was able to discuss and engage with the other members, rather than manage the meeting.”

Motivation can be another challenge, when it comes to members who are volunteering their time as an extra duty.

“With these partnering groups, we let them decide their purpose,” said Dudley. “Instead of telling them ‘this is what we would like you to accomplish,’ we let them know we are looking for input, and when they provide input, we listen and follow up. It is important to at least be responsive to their feedback and their work. Otherwise, they are going to feel like we are wasting their time.”

Summary of Benefits

Several streamlining solutions have come out of the UCI Group, including a certification program, a project development review timeline, and changes to VDOT's sole source and propriety projects process.

"One of the great ideas that has come from the UCI Group lately concerns our sole source and proprietary projects process," said Dudley. "It was kind of cumbersome, and this group decided to look for better ways to do it. They approached VDOT and suggested that the federal code may allow it to be done in a different manner, one that would expedite things on our part, and they were right. This process change not only helped them, but helped us at VDOT, too. These folks come up with a lot of good ideas, and the partnering group allows them to contribute as true stakeholders."

"Localities may originally join the UCI Group for the benefit of managing their own program, but then they often realize these other benefits," said Dudley, "this includes better networking and learning from others and staying in-the-know of what is going on in local programs at the state and federal level. Through our meetings, group members have direct input with the VDOT Central Office as far as suggesting goals we should focus on. It gives them a voice in the current program and in its future."

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- ▶ VDOT's Local Assistance Division website includes several links to information on their local stakeholder partnering groups: <http://www.viriniadot.org/business/local-assistance.asp>
- ▶ EDC 2 Local Public Agency Exchange on Locally Administered Federal-Aid Projects Initiatives: What's in it for You? The recorded Exchange can be found on the FHWA's Accelerating Innovation website: http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/everydaycounts/edctwo/2012/localaid_131124.cfm
- ▶ Federal-aid Essentials is a resource of online videos on Federal-aid regulations and requirements applicable to States and Local Public Agencies: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federal-aidessentials/>
- ▶ The FHWA Federal-aid Program Administration Local Public Agency Web page provides links to Federal-aid reference guides, training resources, and field contacts: <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/federalaid/lpa/index.cfm>

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Every Day Counts (EDC), a State-based initiative of FHWA's Center for Accelerating Innovation, works with State, local and private sector partners to encourage the adoption of proven technologies and innovations aimed at shortening and enhancing project delivery



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