



USDN

urban sustainability
directors network

2022 ANNUAL REPORT

A SNAPSHOT OF LAST YEAR'S IMPACT

Photo by [Jaime Casap](#) on [Unsplash](#)

LETTER FROM OUR BOARD CHAIR

Deborah Raphael



Scientist Louis Pasteur said, “Luck favors a prepared mind.” I’ve always taken this to mean that making ourselves ready to receive the magic and chance of a moment is the best way to improve our shot at success.

But as he expressed, luck is not by accident. It takes work, dedication, and in the case of USDN’s work, a belief in the unique role of local government. This

letter will be my last communication as the President of USDN’s Board of Directors. I have been so proud (and lucky) to be in this role, knowing that 2022 was a pivotal year in our network’s history.

The past year has been anything but easy for those working in local government on sustainability goals. The tail end of the pandemic, ongoing racial inequity, extreme weather, and eroding infrastructure are among just a few the challenges that local governments faced in 2022. And yet, despite these challenges, we have seen profound examples of resilience, creativity, and ingenuity, especially when our members worked together.

I have been honored to support this network, which has accomplished great things because of the contributions each member has made. Our DNA is built on reciprocity and connectedness; couple that with our role as public servants and you have a formidable force for positive and transformative change.

I want to thank our members, donors, my board colleagues, and staff, for making my time as Board Chair so fulfilling. I am excited to continue to support USDN and our new Board Chair Jesse King, grow our collective impact, and help local practitioners be the best change agents possible. We are truly lucky to be held within such a community.

Thank you,
Debbie Raphael

LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Shauna Sylvester



When I think of how I would characterize the past year at USDN, I would use two words: energy and renewal. It’s energy that comes whenever you bring more than two USDN members together in one place, and renewal that emerges when you transition from a pandemic and a period of introspection to a period of engagement with the external world.

This last year has been a time of transition and growth as we begin to reap the fruits of our strategic plan implementation. The federal funding and engagement program is successful and expanding. We’re designing a member experience plan that builds greater connectivity and community among members and lives up to our equity principles and commitments. We are strategizing to better meet the needs of members through regional and affinity organizing. And we adopted a framework to diversify our revenue streams to shore up the financial sustainability of the organization.

I am honored to have joined USDN as the Executive Director last fall and to stand on the shoulders of the giants who led before me: USDN’s former Interim Executive Director and CFO, Lauren Bradley; former Director of Strategic Partnerships, Garret Fitzgerald; former Executive Director Nils Moe; and the exceptional current and past staff who have created a vibrant, service-oriented network shaped by values of reciprocity, belonging, and connectedness.

As we reflect on 2022, I want to thank our members, the board, the devoted and wise members of the Interim National Advisory Committee, the staff of our fiscally sponsored projects, USDN core staff and leadership team, and our funders. Last year was a year of meaningful change and transition and we are excited about what we can accomplish together to advance equity, resilience, and sustainability in 2023 and beyond.

Thank you,
Shauna Sylvester

THANK YOU.

To our supporters and partners, none of this would be possible without you.

Funders

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FOUNDATION

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of MAYORS for
CLIMATE & ENERGY**

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Brothers Fund**

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Partner Networks

 **CUSP** **canadian urban
sustainability practitioners**
A PARTNER NETWORK OF USDN

 **MICHIGAN GREEN COMMUNITIES**

 **COALITION OF
SUSTAINABLE
COMMUNITIES**

 **GREEN CITIES
CALIFORNIA**

Cascadia Network
Florida Sustainability Directors Network
Great Lakes Climate Adaptation Network
Heartland Network
New England Municipal Sustainability Network
Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Network
Virginia Energy & Sustainability Peer Network
Western Adaptation Alliance
4-County Hawai'i Steering Network

 **SSDN** **SOUTHEAST SUSTAINABILITY
DIRECTORS NETWORK**

WHO IS USDN?

Dreamers. Doers. USDN is the network founded by and for sustainability practitioners working with their communities on the ground to build a better world, for everyone, today.

Mission

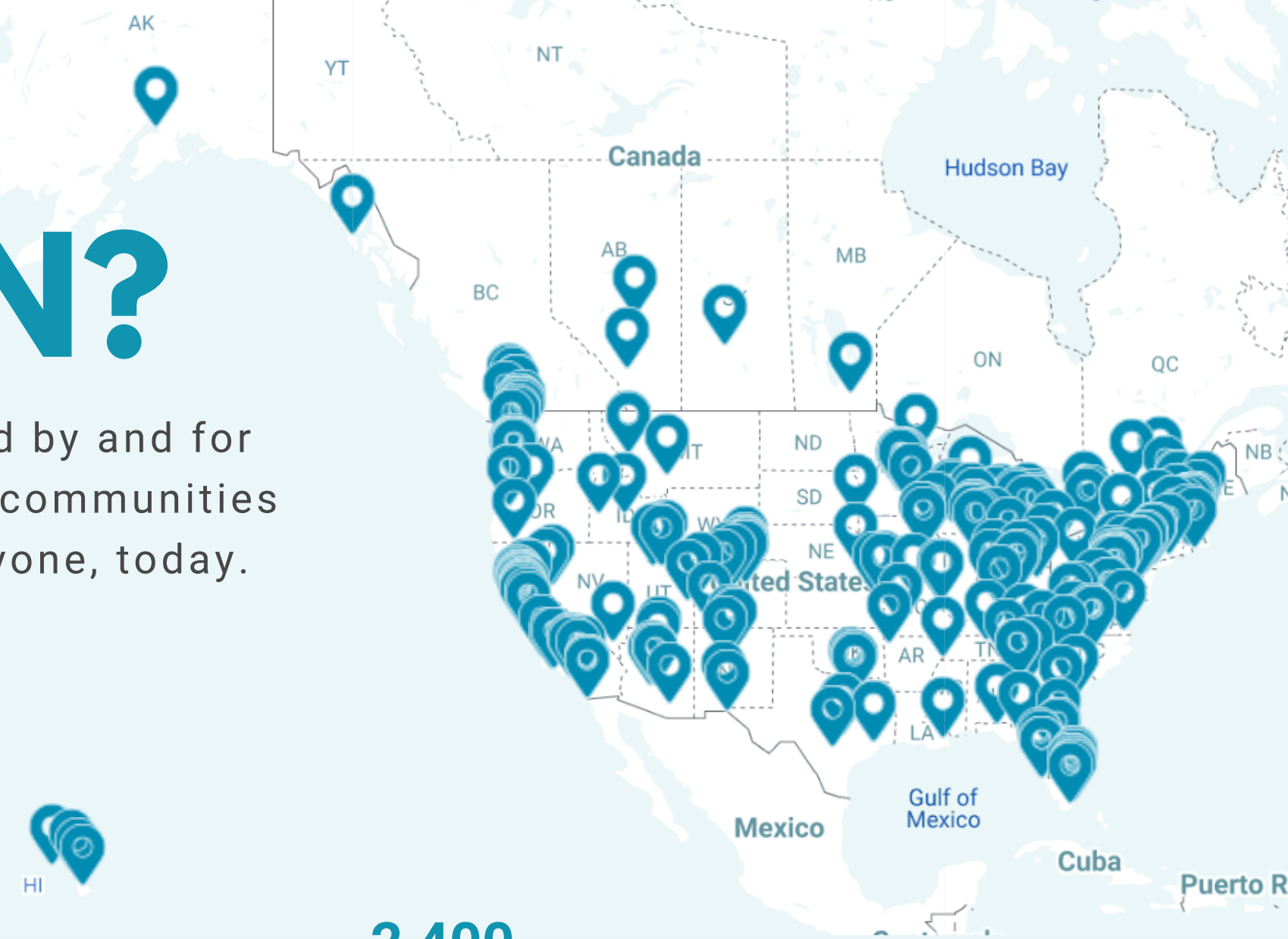
USDN works to create equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities by advancing the field of local government sustainability and equipping practitioners to be catalysts of transformative change.

Vision

An equitable, resilient, and sustainable future for all.

Our Core Values

- A diverse, inclusive and equity-centered approach is essential to achieving our mission.
- Local governments have both an influential role and an inherent responsibility within the movement toward equitable, resilient, and sustainable communities.
- Meaningful, long-lasting change happens from the ground up through a collaborative approach where local governments work with the communities they support.
- By working with each other and their communities, local government sustainability practitioners can accelerate transformative change.



2,400
PRACTITIONERS
in
276
COMMUNITIES
representing
106M
RESIDENTS

“
USDN hands down has been the most influential and important organization to my growth in my current role... The information and knowledge that I have learned through the peer-to-peer learning network has been paramount to my success.
– Tina Carton, former staff in Saratoga Springs, NY

USDN granted nearly \$570,000 in seed funding for collaborative and innovative projects to members in 2022.

CHANGE STARTS WITH PEOPLE.

161 Member workshops, peer learning, and training calls

6,015 Total attendance across USDN sessions

40% Growth in member engagement in 2022

“
USDN is different than other member organizations. It's not just an association - it's a guild. It brings a support system and identity to professionals in a way that is unique.
– Tommy Wells, Director, Department of Energy & Environment, Washington, DC

The heart of USDN is the network. We invest in change agents and give them the tools, relationships, and resources they need to make the magic happen.

“
I appreciate the thoughtfulness in the topics presented and how they're presented, how members are encouraged to connect with each other, and most importantly, the centering of equity in everything that USDN does. I've recommended the network to everyone who's working in government.
– Ana Espiñola, Kauai County, HI

USDN supplied 400 hours of federal funding coaching, technical assistance, and training to 300 members in more than 170 communities in 2022.

PUTTING EQUITY AT THE CENTER.

We will only succeed in our fight to build sustainable communities if we center equity. This is a skill that requires training and honing for a lifetime. USDN creates a place for practitioners to start and grow.

Equity Foundations 2.0 Course

Members developed shared language and analysis on equity, built their individual confidence and ability to engage in racial equity work, established a shared set of equity practices and principles across the network, and created the foundation for ongoing racial equity practice through USDN's Equity Foundations 2.0 program. Over 40 individuals completed the training in fall 2022, and 120 additional individuals are currently working their way through the curriculum.

"The Equity Foundations course helped us consider a different approach to addressing climate challenges. We also decided to create a youth council to guide this work and we will be using some of the tools from the course to do this."
— Kari Ann Elling, Pierce County, WA

Equity in Climate Planning

Lupita Ortiz was an EDI Fellow for the City of Aspen while the City was revising its Climate Action Plan. Lupita held listening sessions with Latinx community members on climate planning and how community members could connect to the City's Climate Office. Lupita gained valuable experience, learned the importance of building strong relationships between local governments and community organizations, and recommended strategies for the City to better engage with the Latinx community.



Equity Diversity Inclusion Fellows Program

This program is designed to invest in and develop the next generation of sustainability leaders and increase the diversity of the field. BIPOC Fellows participated in USDN's Equity Diversity Inclusion Fellowship program over the summer in Tucson (AZ), Missoula County (MT), Newark (NJ), Toronto (ON), and Aspen (CO), where they helped local government sustainability offices prioritize equity work through activities that included community outreach and group trainings. (Photo from 2019 EDI Fellows Panel at the USDN Annual Meeting.)

Equity and Buildings

Nearly 50 participants from 18 local governments participated in a workshop series that shared practical guidance for centering equity within their policies and planning for new and existing buildings. This workshop, hosted in partnership with Emerald Cities Collaborative and Upright Consulting Services, built on the resource [Equity and Buildings: A Practical Framework for Local Government Decision Makers](#), which was also developed by these partners.

270+ INNOVATION LABS.

Every USDN community is an innovation lab where practitioners and community leaders are building, prototyping, testing and scaling the innovation today that will become the practice of tomorrow.

Members learned foundational skills and tools to advance high-impact action

Members joined nearly 200 programming sessions, based on USDN's [High Impact Practices](#), that supported their efforts to advance sustainability goals. Members participated in learning communities such as the Renewable Energy Learning Group, Resilience Hub Community of Practice, Building Electrification and the Gas Transition Learning Group, U.S. Energy Utility Regulation 101, Natural Climate Solutions Learning Group, and more.



USDN's sustainability and zoning mini-series forged a connection between our Environmental Protection and Planning offices during the webinars. This led to discussions on how to embed our Climate Action Plan and General Master Plan update into various areas of the County's code and zoning regulations, and the steps needed to accomplish this. I don't think this would have happened if not for this USDN mini-series!
– Lindsey Shaw, Montgomery County, MD



Regenerative Justice

Nearly 20 local government practitioners participated in USDN's first Regenerative Justice Workshop, where they learned how to center racial equity, Indigenous wisdom, and biomimicry into their processes, plans, and projects. The workshop helped practitioners shift from extractive approaches to addressing climate change to more regenerative and nature-based ones. (Photo from 2022 Regenerative Justice Workshop.)

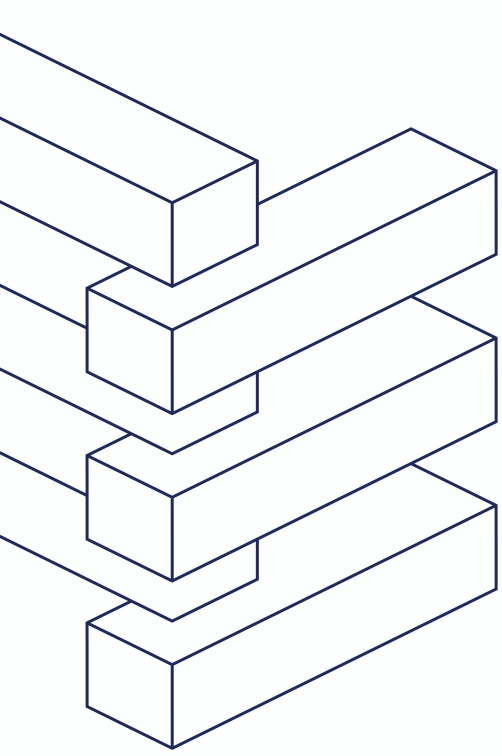
Nexus Initiative and Climate Field Essentials

Seven communities received in-depth training via USDN's Nexus Initiative, which helped internal government processes center equity and kickstart climate planning efforts. More than 100 participants also joined across a series of five webinars on Climate Field Essentials, which included topics under the Nexus Initiative.



From participating in the Nexus, I have a deeper understanding of how people perceive things differently. I also have a deeper and more trusting relationship with my colleagues - we can safely rely on each other for support and a second opinion without judgment. – Michelle Paul, City of New Bedford





MOBILIZING RESOURCES FOR ACTION.

Funding is a crucial element of making a plan a reality. USDN provides catalyst funding and technical assistance to get communities off the starting line and into the race.

Seed funding for collaborative and innovative projects

In 2022, USDN granted nearly \$570,000 to network members through a range of grantmaking programs. These microgrants catalyzed effective collaboration and action in local communities. Supported projects included deploying climate action surveys, using art to communicate climate justice issues, growing the local circular economy through community trustbuilding, and developing more equitable techniques for engaging communities.

Rapid Guide Development

In swift response to passage of the Inflation Reduction Act, and in collaboration with the Sabin Center for Climate Change Law at Columbia Law School, USDN produced one of the first overviews of the Act's climate and sustainability funding. [The Inflation Reduction Act Miniguide](#) summarized initial information on the largest grant programs available to local sustainability staff, preparing members for the rapid rollout of grants in the months ahead.



Technical support through the Federal Funding Program helped us thoroughly evaluate opportunities and gather key pieces of information prior to a grant application's release. We have been dreaming of going after a big grant for a while now but haven't had the capacity to do so. This technical assistance gave us the tools and resources we needed to submit an application for the EPA EJ Government to Government Program. – Caroline Bean, Missoula, MT

Federal Funding Program

USDN launched the Federal Funding Program to help local governments and community organizations fund their climate and equity goals through new programs under the Inflation Reduction Act and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law. The program helps members overcome barriers to accessing funds, such as navigating the many grants available and having limited capacity to develop competitive proposals. USDN delivered 400 hours of coaching, technical assistance, and training to 300 members in more than 170 communities, and helped communities secure over \$100M in state and federal funding with direct proposal assistance.

USDN helped communities secure over \$100M in state and federal funding with direct proposal assistance.

A Watsonville Win

Sustainability staff at the city of Watsonville, CA, a community of 50,000, asked for USDN Technical Assistance for an application to the Department of Energy. We offered extensive editing and proposal review and ultimately helped them and their partners secure a \$2 million grant to conduct whole-house electrification, health and safety remediation, building envelope improvements, and energy efficiency retrofits for low-income households.

CONNECT > LEARN > INSPIRE > ACT

At USDN, practitioners build relationships with peers who can troubleshoot challenges, offer solutions, de-risk new approaches, and inspire greater action. USDN is a safe harbor for our members to restore, refuel, and return to the vital work they do every day.



“USDN has created a systemic resource for municipal sustainability professionals to access knowledge, connections, and financial resources. I simply could not be as effective as I am in my position without USDN.”
– Daniel Hamilton, Oakland, CA

Virtual Annual Meeting

More than 300 local practitioners attended USDN’s Virtual Annual Meeting, where they participated in workshops covering a range of topics, including climate equity, regenerative justice, storytelling, and working in a time of complexity. Members also connected through creative community-building activities that included trivia, yoga sessions, and open discussion forums. Feedback from members on the meeting was overwhelmingly positive, with roughly 95 percent of attendees saying the meeting was well worth their time.

In-Person Regional Meetings

Roughly 300 local sustainability practitioners from across the United States and Canada attended USDN Regional Gatherings held in Austin (TX), Cambridge (MA), Indianapolis (IN), and Portland (OR). Participants learned strategies to build more sustainable communities, including how to access federal funding, expand electric vehicle infrastructure, advance equitable place-based projects. Attendees also participated in a series of conversations on the potential to organize, collaborate, and strategize better regionally and how this approach could accelerate climate solutions at a broader scale.

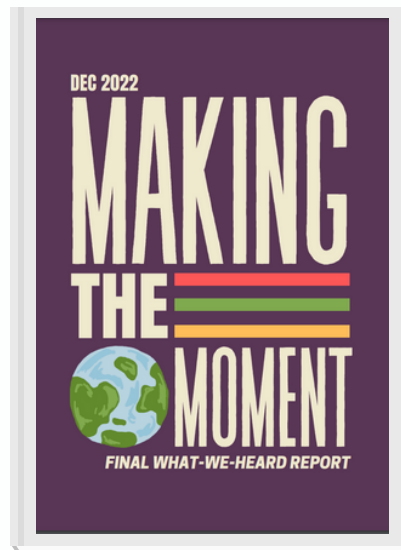
CONNECTION > ACTION:

A USDN workshop plants the seed for a city-CBO partnership

At a USDN event in Portland, OR, Caroline Bean, a USDN member in Missoula County (MT), was inspired by stories of local governments working with community-based organizations (CBOs) to advance equitable climate solutions. After the event, she stayed in touch with workshop presenters from Upright Consulting and the City of Seattle as she prepared a grant application to the Department of Energy. With support from these new connections, Caroline helped form a coalition anchored by Climate Smart Missoula Inc. DOE awarded the coalition funding to work with low-income women to create and scale a workforce development pipeline for clean energy careers, increasing access to well-paying jobs for women.

CHANGING THE GAME.

Meeting this moment requires transformation at scale. We form partnerships across sectors and levels of government and civil society to unlock the full potential of local-level solutions.

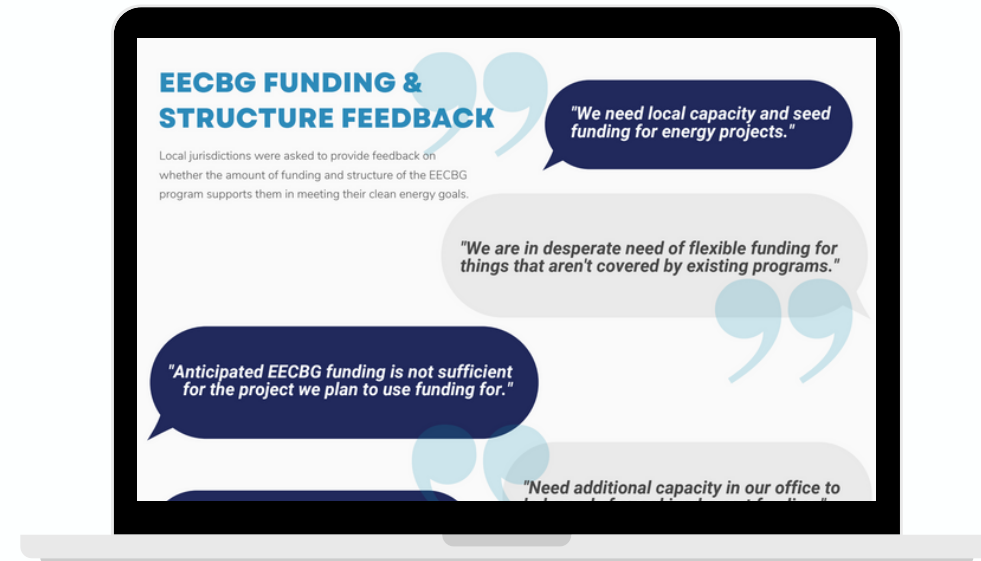


Convened leaders for collective action

Over 70 representatives of city-serving organizations, equity organizations, foundations, government agencies, community organizations, and think tanks came together to build a collective understanding of the opportunities available under new federal funding programs. This dialogue hosted by USDN, [From Naming the Moment to Making the Moment](#), identified how these stakeholders can support the deployment of federal funds so that that money goes to communities advancing equity and climate justice.

Expanded vision of disaster preparedness

USDN developed and deployed [technical tools](#) that help cities integrate equity into their FEMA Hazard Mitigation Plans. Cities can use these tools to assess exposure disparities and incorporate community-informed, equity-centered approaches into plans in order to protect people and property from the impact of natural disasters. Hazard Mitigation Plans are a prerequisite for local and tribal governments to receive certain federal funding, but adding an equity lens to this required work opens up funding opportunities for proactive climate action while helping members prioritize action in their most marginalized and disenfranchised communities.



Connected members and federal agencies for feedback

Network members shared direct feedback with federal staff that shaped federal funding and programs. One session collected feedback for the DOE to shape the Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant program. Another session connected members with the Chief of Staff for the Office of State and Community Energy to discuss DOE grants, tax incentives, and technical assistance resources available to cities and communities.

Leveraged our position as a thought leader

Our staff engaged regularly with federal government agencies that sought USDN's expertise on a range of topics, including how to effectively deploy BIL and IRA funding and embed equity into FEMA's approach to disaster preparedness and recovery. USDN used these opportunities to create trust-based advisory relationships and explore cooperative agreements that could formalize these roles and enable us to receive fair compensation for our advisory services.

Provided a critical voice at key forums

USDN attended national and international events, sharing insight and expertise on the state of local sustainability efforts and building connections with partners. In 2022, USDN staff joined partners at the Climate Change Mayors Summit in Buenos Aires, COP 27, New York Climate Week, Milken Institute Forum on Public Finance, and others.

USDN PEOPLE + PARTNERS

USDN BOARD MEMBERS

Jesse King, Chair
Ingrid Fish, Vice-Chair
Zachary Baumer, Treasurer
Alvaro Sanchez
Cheyenne Flores
Darice Ellis
Sadhu Johnston
Barbara Buffaloe (Advisory)
Debbie Raphael (Advisory)

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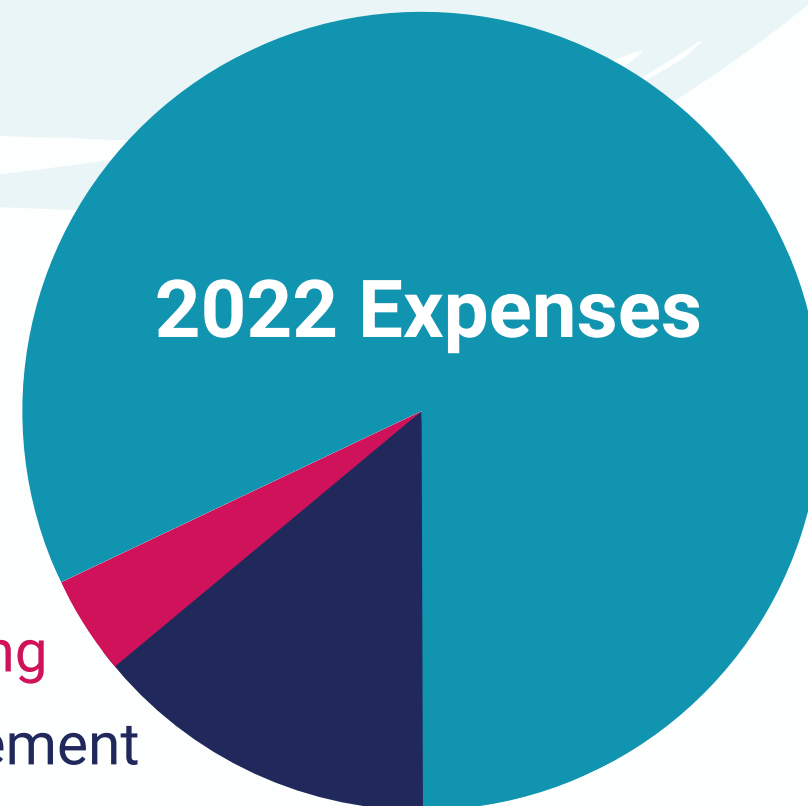
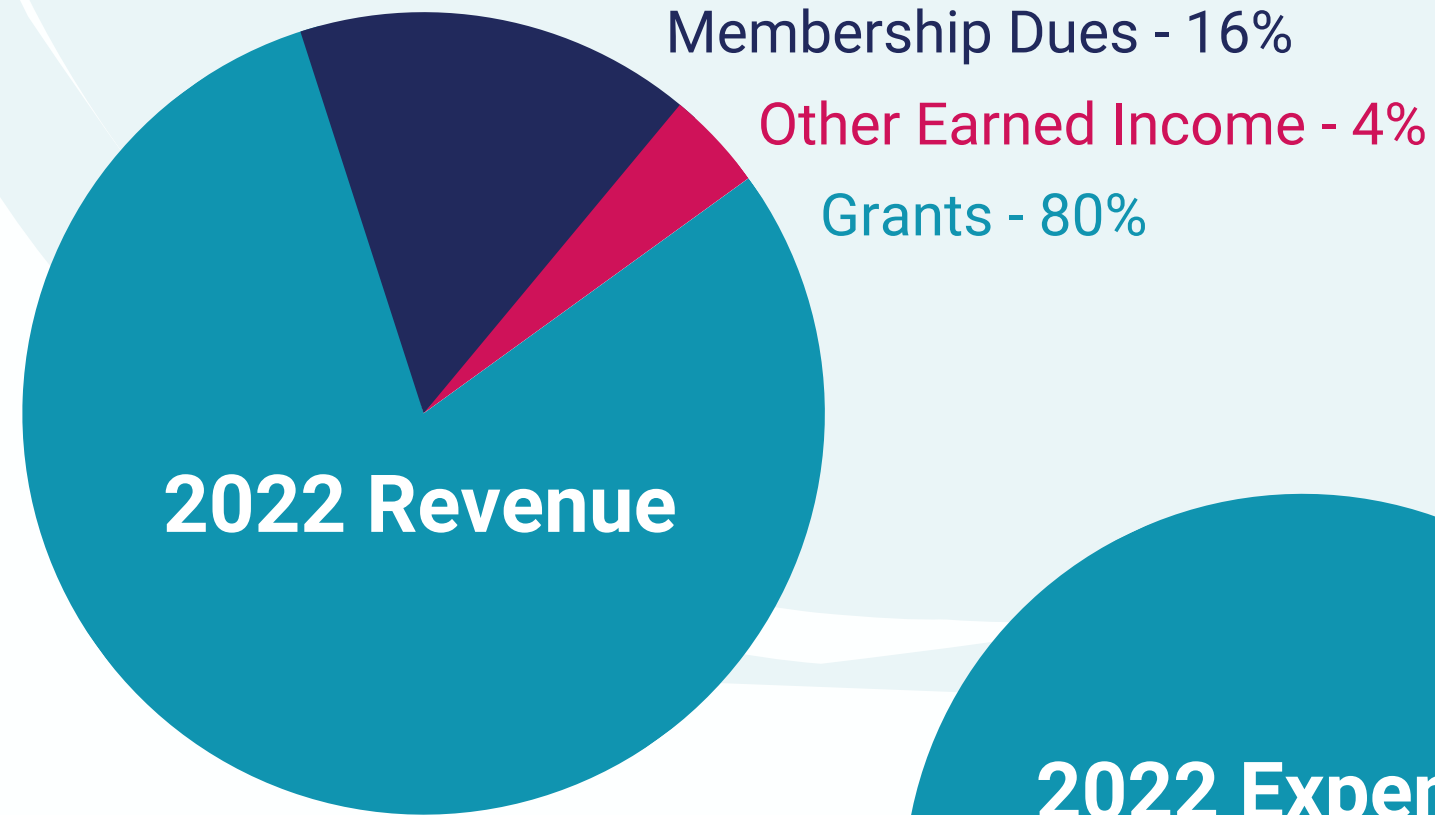
FISCALLY SPONSORED PROJECTS

USDN is grateful for the opportunity to serve as fiscal sponsor for the following organizations:



CNCA

USDN FINANCIALS



Revenue

	2022	2021
Grants	\$5,545,299	\$8,261,112
Membership Dues	\$1,106,678	\$999,208
Other Earned Income	\$307,078	\$549,782
Total Revenues	\$6,959,055	\$9,810,102

Expenses

	2022	2021
Programs	\$7,316,675	\$5,537,725
Management	\$1,294,094	\$997,704
Fundraising	\$314,757	\$150,118
Total Expenses	\$8,925,526	\$6,685,547

	2022	2021
TOTAL BEGINNING NET ASSETS	\$13,508,974	\$10,384,419
TOTAL NET SURPLUS/(DEFICIT)*	(\$1,966,472)	\$3,124,555
TOTAL ENDING NET ASSETS	\$11,542,502	\$13,508,974

* USDN had several multi-year grants in which revenue was claimed in previous years but expenses were incurred in 2022.



USDN

urban sustainability
directors network

support@usdn.org

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EIN: 82-5015863

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