



# USDN | urban sustainability directors network

## USDN PARTNER NETWORK PROGRAM

### CONTENTS

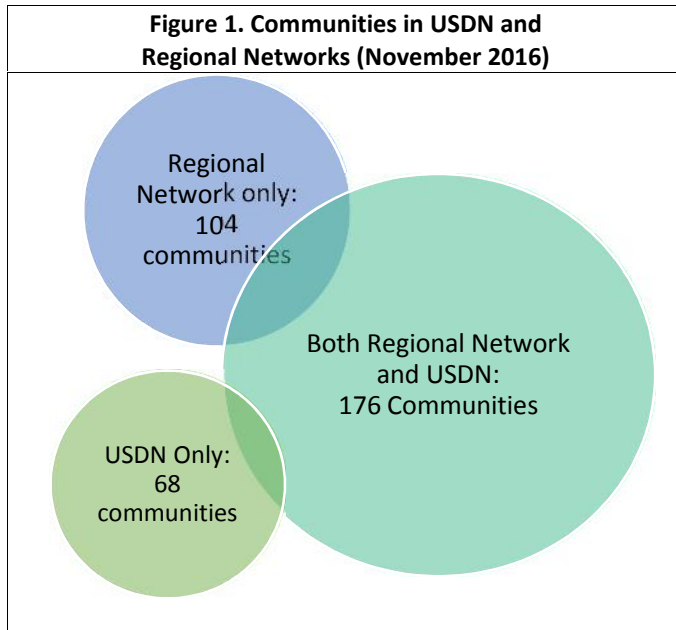
Introduction.....	1
Background.....	2
Program Purpose .....	3
Partner Network Program Elements .....	3
1. Adopt six Network Best Practices - Required.....	4
2. Partner Network Coordination Committee- Required.....	4
3. Membership from USDN and Non USDN Communities- Required.....	4
4. Partner Network Member Surveys- Required .....	5
5. USDN.org - Optional.....	5
6. USDN Grant Programs- Optional.....	6
7. Fiscal Sponsor- Optional.....	6
Eligible Networks.....	6
Partnership Application .....	7
Annual Recommitment Statement.....	8
Appendix- USDN Partner Network Program Workflow.....	9
New Partner Applications and Recommitment Letters.....	9

### INTRODUCTION

This document is a program description of the Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) Partner Network Program (the Program). Networks interested in establishing a partnership with USDN are asked to meet various requirements in order to gain access to a set of resources from USDN. Partner Networks can leverage tools, experience, and knowledge from USDN and in turn USDN can gain access to a broader cohort of communities working on solving urban sustainability challenges. The Program is the outgrowth of a 2016 pilot program between USDN and nine Regional Networks of Sustainability Directors. The purpose of the Program is for USDN to support partner networks as they build their capacity and to maintain strategic partnerships with networks that have access to a broader set of communities working to accelerate urban sustainability.

## BACKGROUND

USDN is a member-driven practitioner network that was established in 2008. Since USDN's inception, spin off networks with different focuses, regional or international for example, have created separate organizations. These other organizations share similar network design elements and have members that participate in both their network and USDN. Over the years, several of these networks have collaborated with USDN to catalyze localized climate adaptation efforts, to disseminate urban sustainability information, and to teach network building best practices.



In 2016, nine Regional Networks<sup>1</sup> of sustainability directors and USDN collaborated again to implement a Regional Network Pilot Program (the Pilot Program) designed to build capacity of Regional Networks and streamline the relationship between Regional Networks and USDN. Over the course of twelve months, eight networks successfully completed the pilot and five showed evolution in network capacity and maturity. The feedback from participating Regional Networks was favorable and supportive of continuing the effort beyond the Pilot Program.

The Pilot Program allowed USDN to explore building the field of practice through this partner network strategy without specifically implementing a USDN membership growth strategy. There were 176 communities participating in Regional Networks during the Pilot, 59% of which solely rely on Regional Networks as their connection to peers in the

urban sustainability field. At the conclusion of the pilot, it was difficult to assess the field building impacts, but Regional Network member survey data broadly shows high value in Regional Networks from their members.

Concurrent to the Pilot Program, USDN developed and adopted a five year strategic plan focused on connecting local government practitioners to accelerate urban sustainability in U.S. and Canadian communities. In this plan, USDN identified the strategy to “maintain coordination with regional networks to extend learnings and foster additional peer exchange opportunities for members.” Regional Networks of sustainability directors provide USDN members with additional opportunities to build connections with their peers, as well as to disseminate the learnings of the network to non-USDN member communities. Regional Networks often have more opportunities for sustainability directors to interact face to face, based on proximity. They also have direct access to communities who are newly committed to sustainability best practices and policies.

USDN also engages with other networks such as the Green Infrastructure Leadership Exchange (the Exchange) and the Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance (CNCA). The Exchange is focused on connecting municipal green stormwater practitioners and is a direct outgrowth from a successful USDN grant effort. CNCA is an international network of vanguard sustainability directors committed to carbon neutrality and is currently housed in the USDN organization. Both of these spin off networks share members with USDN and are developing networks to accelerate the urban sustainability field of practice. This Program is an extension of the 2016 Regional Networks Pilot Program and was designed with specific input, feedback, and guidance of the

<sup>1</sup> Green Cities California, Great Lakes Adaptation Network, Heartland Network, Michigan Green Communities, New England Municipal Sustainability Network, Ohio-Kentucky-Indiana Network, Prairie State Network, Southeast Sustainability Directors Network, and the Western Adaptation Alliance

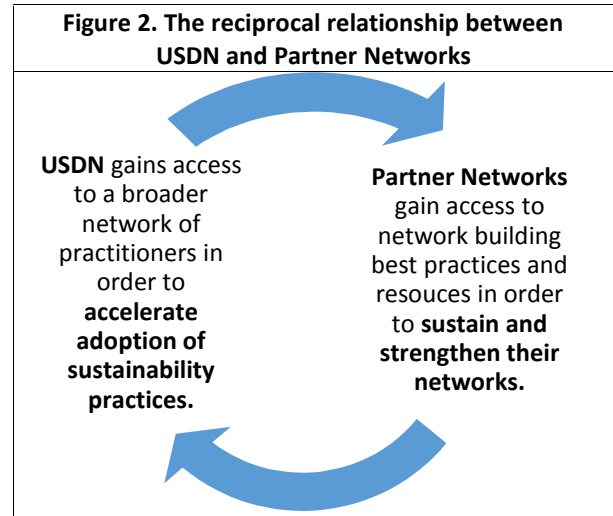
Regional Networks. The Program design however is flexible and USDN may consider piloting this relationship dynamic with other networks such as the Exchange or CNCA in 2017 to understand if this program design can be applied to other networks in addition to Regional Networks.

## PROGRAM PURPOSE

The purpose of the USDN Partner Network Program (The Program) is to establish a reciprocal partnership between USDN and interested Partner Networks. USDN seeks to gain access to a broader network of urban sustainability practitioners in order to accelerate adoption of sustainability practices. Partner Networks seek to gain access to network building best practices and resources in order to strengthen their networks. This program description document details the resources USDN will provide Partner Networks if they meet the outlined requirements.

The goals of this program include:

- Partner Networks strengthen their network capacity with the support and experience from USDN.
- USDN maintains access to a broad set of communities, beyond USDN members, that work to accelerate urban sustainability.



## PARTNER NETWORK PROGRAM ELEMENTS

Partner Networks interested in a partnership with USDN will gain access to seven program elements to support Partner Networks as they build their network capacity and maintain connectivity between USDN and Partner Networks. These resources were identified as valuable partnership elements by members of the USDN Regional Networks Coordinating Committee, tested during the 2016 USDN Regional Network Pilot Program, and reaffirmed as valuable at the conclusion of the Pilot. The

Table 1. Partner Network Program Elements	Required	Optional
1. Adopt 6 Network Best Practices	X	
2. Participate in Partner Network Coordinating Committee (PNCC)	X	
3. Membership from USDN and Non USDN Communities	X	
4. Participate in Partner Network Member Surveys	X	
5. Use USDN.org Website		X
6. Apply to USDN Grant Programs		X
7. Receive Fiscal Sponsorship		X

following pages details the seven resources as program elements and includes a description, intent of the program element, and Partner Network requirements associated with each element.

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## 1. ADOPT SIX NETWORK BEST PRACTICES - REQUIRED

**Description:** There are six foundational network governance and leadership areas that USDN considers network best practices (see list below). Interested networks can use the Network Best Practices Workbook to guide their leadership teams in adopting these practices. The workbook includes samples, worksheets, and instructional PowerPoints for each of the six network foundation areas. Access these materials through the [www.USDN.org](http://www.USDN.org) (About >> Partner Networks >> Network Building Resources). Best practices include:

1. Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision
2. Network Governance and/Steering Committee Structure
3. Network Communications Plan
4. Network Annual Meeting Plan
5. Network Membership Guidelines
6. Network Annual Work Plan

**Intent:** The purpose of asking Partner Networks to adopt these best practices is to build capacity of the network. A network that has not conceived their purpose and vision or established membership guidelines is typically in the early stages of network formation. USDN collaborated with a cohort of Regional Networks as they emerged and is now focusing partnership support of networks that are more established. Networks that are still emerging should use these resources as a self-guide to network building and reconsider applying to the program after the best practices are adopted.

**Partner Network Requirement:** Required. All participating networks must submit documentation for their plans or network policies that demonstrate adoption for each of the six network best practice areas. It is an expectation of the partnership that these documents be maintained and updated over time, and ideally at least reviewed every 3-5 years. See application section for detail on submittal requirements.

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## 2. PARTNER NETWORK COORDINATION COMMITTEE- REQUIRED

**Description:** The Partner Network Coordination Committee (PNCC), formally the Regional Network Coordinating Committee, is a peer learning and information sharing group consisting of two liaisons from each Partner Network. The PNCC will meet quarterly in 2017:

- [February 21<sup>st</sup> at 12pm PST/1pm MT/2pm CT/3pm EST](#)
- [May 23<sup>rd</sup> at 9am PST/10am MT/11am CT/ 12pm EST](#)
- [August 29<sup>th</sup> at 12pm PST/1pm MT/2pm CT/3pm EST](#)
- [November 14<sup>th</sup> at 12pm PST/1pm MT/2pm CT/3pm EST](#)

**Intent:** The purpose of this committee is threefold: 1. to support network building peer learning, 2. to build connections between Partner Network leaders, and 3. to maintain connectivity between USDN and Partner Networks

**Partner Network Requirement:** Required. Partner Networks must appoint two liaisons from the Partner Network and up to one Network Coordinator to participate in the USDN PNCC in a given year. Attendance from at least one person per network is required at every call.

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## 3. MEMBERSHIP FROM USDN AND NON USDN COMMUNITIES- REQUIRED

**Description:** Partner Networks must have 12 or more active members to demonstrate a network base; and must include active membership from at least 3 USDN members and 4 non USDN members.

**Intent:** The intention with this requirement is for Partner Networks to demonstrate a critical mass of interest in the Partner Network through having at least 12 network members. Networks of any smaller size typically struggle to deliver deep value to their members because the work needed to propel a network is substantial enough that it can be difficult to be carried by 11 or less volunteer individuals. Additionally, Partner Networks need to have at least 3 USDN members and 4 non USDN members. The requirement for USDN members is to ensure the highly successful culture of the USDN network is disseminated into associated Partner Networks which is believed to increase the strength for the network. The requirement for non USDN members is to differentiate Partner Networks from topic-based clusters of USDN members, and disseminating lessons learned to communities outside of USDN's formal membership is a core value proposition for the network to fundraise and prioritize support for the Program.

**Partner Network Requirement:** Required. Partner Networks must have 12 or more active members to demonstrate a network base; and must include active membership from at least 3 USDN members and 4 non USDN members.

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#### 4. PARTNER NETWORK MEMBER SURVEYS- REQUIRED

**Description:** USDN provides coordination and analysis for Partner Networks to survey their members. Partner Networks will coordinate their members' participation in annual member surveys. Surveys will be co-designed with Partner Network leaders and conducted by USDN. This program element will only be offered to Partner Networks up to once a year. The survey process will be conducted in June and July in 2017 and will include the following steps:

- PNs submit most recent member contact list to USDN
- USDN to design required survey questions; for example, connectivity mapping, sustainability metrics, etc.
- PNs submit additional survey question text to USDN (see sample survey questions from 2016)
- USDN provide survey links to PNCC liaisons to distribute to Partner Network Members
- Surveys are open for Partner Network Members to complete
- Survey closes
- Survey analysis, including connectivity mapping if necessary, completed by USDN and shared with PNCC liaisons
- PNCC call to discuss understanding the analysis of the surveys

**Intent:** Member surveys are an important tool to measure network health and performance across key metrics. The data analysis provided through this survey will help Partner Networks assess progress and create successful work plans.

**Partner Network Requirement:** Required. Partner networks will be responsible for supplying USDN with a revised draft of the member survey by the prescribed deadlines, as well as conduct the outreach to their members regarding completing the survey.

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#### 5. USDN.ORG - OPTIONAL

**Description:** USDN.org is a website designed by and for sustainability directors that allows communications outside of email, discussion forums, and document sharing and storing. This website is primarily a members' only website, with a separate section for information for the general public. Partner Networks that opt into using the website will gain access to a private group within the website exclusive to their Partner Network. Non-USDN members will have access to resources shared – both by Partner Network members and others – but will not have access to resources exclusive to USDN members. USDN will provide individual accounts for members of Partner Networks, as well as provide website support, such as user tutorials.

**Intent:** An online forum where members can communicate, share documents, and/or calendar events together can be a valuable tool in helping members stay connected with each other. For networks that currently don't have a communication

platform, this would be a valuable tool. Additionally, USDN members are highly engaged with this website already so Partner Networks that opt into using this website will reduce redundancy for some of their members.

**Partner Network Requirement:** Optional. Partner Networks that opt into using the USDN.org website will be contacted by USDN staff to create member accounts. Partner Networks need to review their member accounts annually (at a minimum) and notify USDN of any membership changes so accounts can be added and deleted as needed.

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## 6. USDN GRANT PROGRAMS- OPTIONAL

**Description:** USDN will accept applications to network grant funds from Partner Networks so long as the application can dually meet the requirements of the grant RFP and any secondary benefit to the Partner Network. Partner Networks can apply to USDN grant funds to support collaborations of network members. In order to be successful in these competitive grant applications, Networks must meet the requirements of the grant RFP first and foremost before any secondary benefit to the Partner Network.

**Intent:** USDN grant programs are designed to foster collaboration between peers and to accelerate the adoption of urban sustainability practices. Currently, USDN has several grant programs that award grants through multiple RFPs throughout the course of the year. Some grant programs have specifically targeted Regional Networks in the past, there is no guarantee that these types of RFPs will be available each year.

**Partner Network Requirement:** Optional. Any Partner Network interested in applying to a USDN grant fund must compete by applying to a specific RFP and meeting all of the requirements in the RFP.

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## 7. FISCAL SPONSOR- OPTIONAL

**Description:** Partner Networks seeking a fiscal sponsor can connect directly to USDN's fiscal sponsor Global Philanthropy Partnership (GPP) who can receive, distribute, and report upon funds on the networks behalf. When USDN finalizes the process to become a 501(c)3 organization, fiscal sponsorship may be offered through GPP or USDN directly. The cost for fiscal sponsorship normally ranges from 6-8% of funds raised by the regional network.

**Intent:** In order for organizations to raise money through philanthropic sources or member dues, the organization needs to have a federally recognized tax exempt status such as a nonprofit 501c3. Becoming a nonprofit is an extensive process that some Partner Networks may not want to go through despite wanting to raise philanthropic funding or member dues. An alternative is to utilize a fiscal sponsor organization to receive, process, and report on funds in exchange for a fiscal sponsorship fee.

**Partner Network Requirement:** Optional. Partner Networks interested in fiscal sponsorship should directly contact April Donnellan ([april@global-philanthropy.org](mailto:april@global-philanthropy.org)), the Executive Director of Global Philanthropy Partnership, to discuss details of a potential Memorandum of Understanding for fiscal sponsorship.

## ELIGIBLE NETWORKS

The Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) defines a Regional Network as a member-driven network of local government sustainability professionals sharing similar geographical, cultural, and economic context. Regional Networks are organic and structure themselves based on mutual interest and shared challenges. They can be a conglomerate of local governments sharing state boundaries, can span multiple states, or can share political environments.

Regional Networks considering a formal relationship with USDN meet the following criteria:

- The network supports local government sustainability professionals who routinely collaborate across departments and throughout their communities to advance local government sustainability goals;
- The network must represent North American communities;
- The network must have adopted the six Network Best Practices referenced in this document and be able to submit supporting documentation to USDN;
- The network must include active membership from at least 3 USDN members and 4 non USDN members;
- The network must have 12 or more active members to demonstrate a network base; and
- Be willing to complete an annual survey of their members through USDN.

As mentioned in the background section of this document, USDN may consider using this program design to pilot relationship dynamics with networks other than Regional Networks such as the Exchange and/or CNCA. Consideration for eligibility of other networks will be addressed at that potential future time.

## NEW PARTNERSHIP APPLICATION

Partner Networks interested in establishing a partnership with USDN can apply to the USDN Partner Network Program on a rolling basis by submitting an application packet to Mia Arter at [miaarter@usdn.org](mailto:miaarter@usdn.org) and Maggie Ullman at [maggie@ullmanconsulting.net](mailto:maggie@ullmanconsulting.net). The official program begins February 2017 so it is preferred that applications are submitted by February 1, 2017. Carefully read all of the program element descriptions above and eligibility requirements to ensure the application is prepared to be accepted. *Note: Regional Networks that participated in the 2016 USDN Regional Network Pilot Program will use the guidelines in the [Annual Recommitment Statement](#) section of this program description to apply to the 2017 Program.*

**The Application Packet needs to include the following:**

1. **Letter of Interest to include:**
  - a. Network Name
  - b. Names and contact information of Partner Network Coordinating Committee (PNCC) liaisons and commitment to participate in PNCC calls.
  - c. Network website if applicable
  - d. Summary statement of network origins and brief history.
  - e. Brief description of why the network is interested in participating the USDN Partner Network Program.
  - f. **Optional Program Element Preferences**
    - i. Will your network use the USDN.org website?
    - ii. Will your network contact GPP to discuss fiscal sponsorship?
2. **Supporting materials for the six adopted Network Best Practices** preferably in MS Word or Google Docs format.
  - a. Vision Network Purpose, Goals, and Vision
  - b. Network Governance and/Steering Committee Structure
  - c. Network Communications Plan
  - d. Network Annual Meeting Plan
  - e. Network Membership Guidelines
  - f. Network Annual Work Plan



3. **Partner Network Membership List.** Please provide a list and contact information for all active<sup>2</sup> network members. The preferred format is MS Excel or Google Sheets. PDFs will not be accepted. Please use this sample template for the column headings:

First Name	Last Name	Community	Email Address	USDN or Non USDN Member Community	PNCC Liaison	Network Steering Committee
Andre	Smith	Anytown, USA	andre@anytown.gov	Non USDN Member	Yes	No

USDN staff will respond within 30 days of receipt of the application packet with further information about the application and/or any questions. Once accepted into the program, USDN will: enroll appointed members in Partner Network Coordinating Committee (PNCC) calls, provide information about USDN grant programs, and provide the timeline for the Partner Network member survey. Networks that opt in will be contacted about setting up USDN.org accounts for Partner Network members.

## ANNUAL RECOMMITMENT STATEMENT

*\*NOTE- Networks that participated in the 2016 Regional Networks Pilot Program will use these guidelines for the 2017 program.*

Partner Networks that would like to continue participating in the Program in the coming year will submit a Recombitment Statement each winter to USDN. Recombitment Statements can be sent via email to Mia Arter at [miaarter@usdn.org](mailto:miaarter@usdn.org) and Maggie Ullman at [maggie@ullmanconsulting.net](mailto:maggie@ullmanconsulting.net). In 2017, the deadline to submit this statement is February 1<sup>st</sup>.

This Recombitment Statement must include:

1. **Email Notice:** An email confirming the network intention to participate in the Program during the following year and notice of any changes to the PNCC liaisons
2. **Updated/Adopted Best Practice Materials (if applicable).** Any updated Network Best Practices or other eligibility documentation.
3. **Optional Program Element Preferences**
  - a. Will your network use the USDN.org website?
  - b. Will your network contact GPP to discuss fiscal sponsorship?
4. **Updated Partner Network Membership List.** Please provide a list and contact information for all active<sup>3</sup> network members. The preferred format is MS Excel or Google Sheets. PDFs will not be accepted. Please use this sample template for the column headings:

First Name	Last Name	Community	Email Address	USDN or Non USDN Member Community	PNCC Liaison	Network Steering Committee
Andre	Smith	Anytown, USA	andre@anytown.gov	Non USDN Member	Yes	No

*Note: Networks from the Pilot Program that did not complete 100% of the Pilot Program requirements need to submit the remaining materials before they can be accepted into the 2017 Program. Their Partner Network benefits will be suspended until this final documentation is submitted.*

<sup>2</sup> Active membership constitutes individuals who have participated in the network via a call or face to face meeting in the last 12 months.

<sup>3</sup> Active membership constitutes individuals who have participated in the network via a call or face to face meeting in the last 12 months.



## APPENDIX- USDN PARTNER NETWORK PROGRAM WORKFLOW

### NEW PARTNER APPLICATIONS AND RECOMMITMENT LETTERS

The following is the workflow that USDN program staff will use to process applications from potential Partner Networks:

1. Receive application.
2. Use the [Eligible Networks](#) section in this program description as a checklist to review if the network meets all eligibility requirements.
3. Use the [Partnership Application](#) guidelines in this program description as a checklist to review if all materials were submitted.
4. Communicate missing elements if application is not complete.
5. When application is complete, contact the network's PNCC liaisons confirming acceptance into the program. Welcome email will include information on RPCC calls, USDN grant opportunities, and Partner Network surveys.
6. Add PNCC liaisons to the PNCC contact list and add to any existing calendar invitations.
7. Update the PNCC Member Inventory with network membership information.
8. For networks that opted into USDN.org, send a separate email to PNCC liaisons with directions for getting their members registered on USDN.org and scheduling a website orientation, if desired.
9. Be available to provide support and guidance to PNCC liaisons integrate into the program and maximize benefits to their membership.