

USDN Peer Learning Exchange Grant Program 2016 Annual Report

History

The USDN Peer Learning Exchange program was launched in 2013 with support from the Summit Foundation and grew in 2016 with support from the JPB Foundation. The grant program is designed to support USDN members to meet in person with their peers to learn and share together about one or more practices, policies, or programs. Through the program, members convene for:

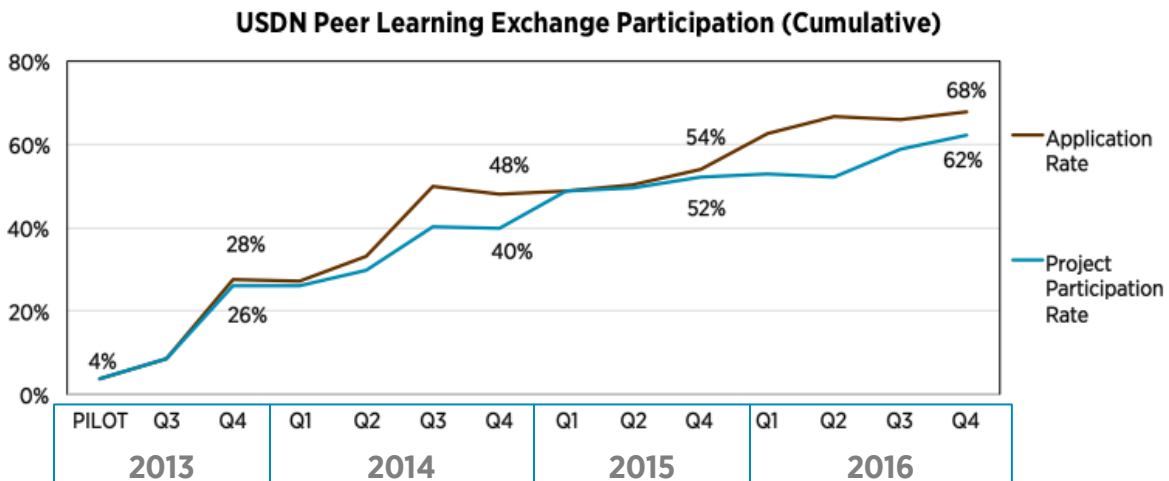
- **In-Depth Exchanges:** Detailed discussions between two or more members to deeply explore several shared priority topics, creating value for all participants,
- **Best Practice Disseminations:** Collaborative work to deeply share a member’s specific and unique policy/practice with one or more peers who are ready to adapt it, and
- **Peer Reviews:** Critical assessments of and/or recommendations for a member’s selected policy/program by one or more peers.

A volunteer committee of USDN members has guided the evolution of this grant program and works to review and select high-quality proposals. Proposals are solicited through an RFP process, which is launched every three months, in order to fund exchanges as timely topics arise.

2016 USDN Peer Learning Exchange Committee Members:

- Jacqui Bauer; Bloomington IN, *co-chair*
- Lisa LaRocque; Las Cruces NM, *co-chair*
- Celia VanDerLoop; Denver, CO
- Erin Miller; Columbus, OH
- Jennifer Green; Burlington VT
- Kristopher Stenger; Winter Park, FL
- Peter Nierengarten; Fayetteville AR

As of December 2016, the USDN Peer Learning Exchange grant program has awarded \$137,484.15 to fund 34 exchanges, with a total of 164 participating USDN member communities. 68% of members have collaborated on proposals through its first four years.



2016 Grants

In 2016, USDN Peer Learning Exchange grant program funded 12 in-person exchanges for participants from 61 member communities:

- Eugene OR received \$5,000 to convene with Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Richmond, and Washington DC to learn about [sustainable event policies](#), immersing attendees into the workings of the certified 2016 U.S. Olympic Trials. [Read more](#).
- Burlington VT received \$5,000 to travel with Fort Collins to Austin to discuss how [municipally owned utilities](#) can leverage technologies and practices like micro-grids and fiber optic networks to meet sustainability goals.
- Vancouver BC received \$3,215 to host Portland OR to discuss how each has improved [local deconstruction programs](#) to manage demolition waste and to build a more consistent approach for certifying regional contractors.
- Seattle WA received \$4,930 to host Los Angeles, Portland OR, San Francisco, and Vancouver to explore how West Coast cities can participate in the [EV charging ecosystem](#) through policy design, public investment, and facilitating partnerships.
- Alexandria VA received \$5,580 to travel with Alexandria, Blacksburg, Fairfax, Falls Church, Roanoke, and five non-member communities in Virginia to Richmond to work with ACEEE staff to develop customized local [energy efficiency road maps](#).
- Vancouver BC received \$3,085 to host San Francisco to compare efforts to engage residents in [climate resiliency planning](#) and emergency management.
- Oakland CA received \$6,160 to travel with Eugene and San Francisco to Portland OR to discuss [consumption-based GHG emissions](#) goals, reduction strategies, and inventories and implications for climate action planning.
- Aspen CO received \$4,200 to travel with Western Adaptation Alliance members Boulder, Denver, El Paso, Flagstaff, Fort Collins, Lakewood, Las Cruces, Park City, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, Santa Fe, and Tucson to Las Vegas to discuss [climate adaptation efforts](#), including municipal staff training and using the results of a collaborative project to develop story maps as communications tools.



November 2016 Exchange on climate adaptation with 14 cities in the Mountain West

- Boulder CO received \$3,900 to travel with Boston, Boulder, Burlington, San Francisco, and Washington DC to New York City to build a market-driven [decarbonization of thermal energy sectors](#) with public and private sector partners.
- Leon County FL received \$4,480 to host Orlando, Sarasota County, Tallahassee, and three non-USDN member communities in Florida to discuss sustainability in local [tourism industries](#).
- St. Peters MO received \$4,650 to host Columbia, Fayetteville, Johnson County, Lawrence, and two non-USDN member communities in the Heartland region to discuss managing [hard-to-recycle waste materials](#) in current city systems.
- Vancouver BC received \$7,000 to travel to New York City with Jersey City and Newark to discuss the human health and environmental sustainability concerns about [cooling towers in buildings' HVAC systems](#).

Follow up reports for these and all previous USDN Peer Learning Exchanges are available to USDN members on the USDN.org website [here](#).

[2016 Grant Impacts](#)

In 2016, 87% of members rated the USDN Peer Learning Exchange grant program as high value, an increase of over 15% from 2014. Its value was second only to the USDN Annual Meeting, which has consistently been the most valuable USDN activity with 99% of members rating it “high value” in 2016.

In September 2016, USDN members leveraged Peer Learning Exchange funding to build on other collaborative efforts relating to [decarbonizing the thermal energy sector](#). Past work included a USDN Innovation Fund grant in 2015 to develop a framework for municipalities and a CNCA Innovation Fund grant later in 2015 to apply strategies to Boulder and San Francisco. The 2016 exchange allowed Boston, Boulder, Burlington, San Francisco, and Washington DC to attend a meeting with public and private sector partners hosted by the Rockefeller Brothers Fund. This workshop was designed to explore potential to rapidly scale renewable heating and cooling (RH&C) markets in U.S. cities with representatives from heat pump manufacturers, policymakers, and technical experts. Participants identified

several opportunities to collaborate and invest resources to reduce reliance on fossil fuels for heating and cooling to achieve climate goals. Findings from this exchange will be implemented through two new grants from the USDN and CNCA Innovation Fund. An exchange participant noted the importance of these coordinated projects: *It “provided important insight into how other cities are approaching renewable heating and cooling action and how heat-pump manufacturers perceive technical, regulatory, and marketing obstacles to greater adoption of that technology.* This exchange was a perfect prologue to the renewable thermal project that the City of Boston—along with its partners in Somerville, Northampton, Providence, and Portland ME—are just launching with support from the CNCA. The goal of the New England project is to create tailored campaigns for each of the five cities to increase use of renewable thermal.”

In October 2016, representatives from five major urban centers along the West Coast – Los Angeles, Portland OR, San Francisco, Seattle, and Vancouver – convened for two days of conversation and discussion about the [role of municipal government in accelerating electric vehicle deployment](#). Each of the five cities presented on the existing nature of EVs in their cities and then explored challenges including promoting EV use while reducing VMTs and congestion, EVs in the shared mobility economy, and leveraging their collective political and financial capital to get access to cleaner vehicles for our fleets. *The latter discussion led directly to the U.S. participants issuing a joint RFI produce “a potentially record-breaking order” of 24,000 electric vehicles.* Vancouver will be appended to the document for data and illustrative purposes, and other members of the Mayor’s National Climate Change Agenda are invited to join as well. One participant in the exchange noted, “Over the past two years, I have attended many electric vehicle conferences and the USDN Peer Learning Exchange in Seattle was one of the most productive conferences that I have attended.”

In November 2016, a group of ten communities in Virginia partnered with ACEEE staff to learn more about energy efficiency actions, including tools like the ACEEE Local Energy Efficiency Self-Scoring Tool and the Local Energy Efficiency Policy Calculator (LEEP-C) tool for energy efficiency policy evaluation. The municipalities used the session to [create a customized roadmap for implementing energy efficiency actions](#) that have the greatest potential impact on reducing carbon emissions in their community. Member participants left the exchange able to better prioritize short- and long-term local actions, including several cities that plan to elevate fleet policies in their upcoming work plans. One participant noted, *“The discussions during the Peer Learning Exchange meeting and the summary of the Self-Scoring tool results (from all participating jurisdictions) helped me to identify best practices and/or obtain examples of initiatives in areas where we are currently lacking.”* Participants also invited several state government agencies and organizations to join part of the session to explore opportunities for collective statewide action like improving access to utility energy data, enhancing effectiveness of state building and energy codes, and exploring other policies like benchmarking and disclosure and LED street light conversions. Following the meeting, the Virginia Energy Efficiency Council (VAEEC) agreed to coordinate ongoing exchange between the municipalities and to serve as a resource for local governments to work and communicate together.

