

## USDN Members Identify Biggest Opportunities for Sustainability Impact

*Have you ever wondered which local initiative has the greatest effect on reducing GHGs or building support for sustainability programming – and how much investment it takes to pull it off?*

**USDN conducted a survey in the spring of 2016 of 112 diverse cities and counties in the United States and Canada to answer these questions.**

### **Purpose of the Survey**

Sustainability Directors bring a tremendous amount of expertise and knowledge to their roles in local governments. They come from a variety of educational backgrounds – from environmental science to urban planning to engineering. They have deep experience with a broad array of municipal sustainability initiatives – from energy efficiency to hazard mitigation to transformative leadership. And they collectively hold a lot of knowledge about the field of urban sustainability. With this 2016 survey, USDN aimed to capture some of the perspectives of this collective wisdom on a selection of key sustainability practices.

USDN members have community-wide responsibility for sustainability initiatives – meaning they oversee not only municipal government activities but also programs to make the entire community more energy efficient, equitable, resilient, and sustainable. Members work in cities and counties in the United States and Canada, executing programs that impact over 73 million people in North America.

The USDN 2016 Member Impact Survey gathered member opinions about opportunities to create impact in their communities. The resulting analysis shows the actions that have the highest potential for impact with the lowest barriers for implementation. The report is not intended as a recommendation to the field, but as reflections of the current experiences and knowledge of local government Sustainability Directors.

Members informed the design of the survey and the analysis, as a way to help each other prioritize next step actions and make the case for new policies. USDN leadership will also use it to identify areas where the network can best support its members. *It is USDN's hope that key stakeholders in the field may also find it valuable in identifying those actions in which cities need more external support, innovation, and investment – or to gain insight into the current thinking of local government officials.*



## **Survey Methodology**

For this analysis, USDN members reacted to over fifty sustainability actions and their potential in their communities, including (1) how established it is, (2) its potential for impact, and (3) its ease of implementation. For the purposes of this survey, impact is defined in three ways:

- **GHG Impact** = Impact of an action on GHG emissions reductions
- **Political Will Impact** = Impact of an action on local political/community support for future action
- **Quality of Life Impact** = Impact of an action on quality of life for disadvantaged communities

The actions are divided by sector, and the report uses a standard format for representing the data:

- A **green bar chart** shows how common the actions are among members – the darker green, the more established it is. The gray section of each bar shows the portion of cities that are not working on that practice.
- The **second bar chart** breaks down those gray sections to show the reasons why those actions are not being implemented everywhere. Some are not feasible; some are feasible and are simply not part of the workplan.
- Then a **quadrant chart** compares the potential for impact (on the x axis) and the feasibility for implementation (on the y axis). Each action is represented with a line, showing the range of impact scores for all three definitions of impact.

The quadrant charts are dense representations of a considerable amount of significant data. Most actions fall in the bottom right section of the quadrant chart – meaning they are high-impact, low-feasibility. Some move up into the top-right quadrant – the low hanging fruit section, where actions are both high-impact and relatively easier to implement. The lines representing each action show the range of potential impact across the three impact pathways. Some actions have a long line on the chart, indicating stronger impacts in one impact area than others – like a strong impact on quality of life for disadvantaged residents with modest GHG reductions.

The summary section of the survey report, as well as the other articles in the July 2016 USDN Urban Sustainability Innovation Report ([here](#)), offer deeper interpretation of these results. View the full survey report on the USDN.org website [here](#), and download a sortable spreadsheet of all 52 actions and scores [here](#).