

Swapping Good Practices: Connecting on Open Data, Budgets, and Sporting Events

USDN's Peer Learning Exchange brings cities together to learn from each other on how to make local government operations more sustainable. This article provides highlights of some of these exchanges.

Whole Building Energy Data Access and Benchmarking

Members of the USDN Utility Data User Group wanted to make it easier for local governments to obtain data they need to plan, implement, and evaluate energy efficiency initiatives supporting their climate action goals. Unfortunately, many pioneering cities found that a lack of access to utility data limits their opportunities to measure progress and drive change. Three California cities led a 2015 USDN Peer Learning Exchange to focus on the use cases for aggregated whole building data access for owners and operators of residential and non-residential commercial buildings.

- Part One: Cities shared their current experience and understanding about the challenges that have delayed whole-building data access and opportunities within the regulatory framework of state government.
- Part Two: These USDN members met with other cities, representatives from state agencies and public- and investor-owned utilities about this specific issue to delve deeper into the challenges (perceived and/or real) and share lessons learned.

Because of the Exchange, members committed to continuing work with the state legislature. This work ultimately contributed to the passage of California Assembly Bill AB 802 to enhance access to whole building energy data, ultimately helping cities with energy benchmarking and transparency ordinances. One participant noted, "The benchmarking element of the bill awaiting Governor Brown's signature is a direct result" of the exchange.



Green Capital Improvement Plan (CIP)

In 2013, many cities around the country were wrestling with how to finance structural improvements and upgrades to its city buildings and infrastructure, while saving energy and simultaneously meeting its aggressive greenhouse gas reduction goals as articulated in the city's Climate Action Plan. To learn more, one USDN member brought their team to Asheville NC to better understand the development and implementation of a Green Capital Improvement Plan (Green CIP), and the city's ability to finance many of the improvements capable of achieving a significant carbon footprint reduction over five years through creative financing. (Read a case study on Asheville's program [here](#).)

Over two days, staff from both cities engaged in extensive, in-depth small group discussion on the creation and integration of a Green CIP. This exchange included important policy considerations around revising accounting and finance structures with an eye towards energy efficiency and maintenance. Discussion also focused on LED street light conversion and how the annual savings from the LED replacements can be captured and used to both pay off the debt incurred for fixture procurement while funding other energy saving initiatives. This gathering also allowed both cities to compare, contrast, and brainstorm on issues of specific relevance to smaller cities.

Green Sporting Events

This Peer Exchange brought USDN members and others together during the 2016 U.S. Olympic Trials for Track and Field for two days to discuss responsible sporting events. The intent was to learn from each other about how to leverage efforts to advance local sustainability related initiatives, evaluate Council for Responsible Sport Certification criteria, and experience the certification being implemented at the Trials event.

During the session, attendees worked collaboratively with colleagues from cities across the United States to identify the most cost effective means to align sporting event certification in the effort to advance their municipality's sustainability goals. Lessons from this exchange include:

- Start with a clear framework of operationally and economically achievable goals that have been demonstrated at other responsible sporting events across the United States and/or in one's own city.
- Apply the framework in a way that is tailored to meet the unique needs and requirements of the host community; coaching through a peer-network is useful at this stage, since the knowledge base for this approach is still developing.

Consider that a sporting event can be used to support the people of the host community; sports can naturally create a "net positive" social exchange for everyone who visits and for everyone who hosts.