

# Civic Infrastructure and Sustainable Regional Planning: Insights From the Sustainable Communities Initiative Regional Planning Grantees

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## Abstract

*This article explores the potential of the federal government to support equitable, sustainable regional planning through coupled investments in civic infrastructure and infrastructure for transportation, housing, and environmental protection. Civic infrastructure is defined as “the invisible structures and processes through which the social contract is written and rewritten in communities” (Parr, 1993: 93). Civic engagement activities are the building blocks of civic infrastructure. If such activities are artfully designed and integrated into a larger process, they can build the capacity of diverse communities to self-organize, learn, and act in support of a shared regional vision. Drawing on the history of regional planning and the evolution of civic engagement, we make a case for the importance of investment in civic infrastructure to support socially just and sustainable regional planning. This article explores the current state of innovation in civic infrastructure, using data from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development’s Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI). This study classifies the civic engagement activities employed by all 74 SCI Regional Planning Grant recipients along the International Association for Public Participation spectrum of public participation. The breadth of this analysis is coupled with an indepth case study of the Buffalo-Niagara, New York region’s civic engagement process. Together, the analysis and case study reveal a wealth of innovative civic engagement strategies and provide a framework for implementing an inclusive regional civic engagement process. The study concludes that regional planning can couple investments in civic infrastructure with physical infrastructure to support more equitable and sustainable regional development.*

## Introduction

Across the United States, regional communities contend with a host of social and ecological challenges, resulting from a regional planning paradigm that privileged suburban, automobile-oriented development and established spatially segregated regions with significant opportunity disparities. The emergence of the Smart Growth movement has called for a paradigm focused on transit-oriented regional development and reinvestment in urban centers where infrastructure investments are more cost efficient. As regional planners move forward on this path, how might they design civic engagement processes in ways that build community capacity to collaboratively establish equitable, sustainable communities of opportunity?

This article explores this overarching question through a literature review of civic engagement in regional planning and a two-part case study of civic engagement practices used by 74 regional communities that received grants from the federal Sustainable Communities Initiative Regional Planning Grant (SCI-RPG) program of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD). SCI was a product of the Partnership for Sustainable Communities, an interdepartmental federal effort by HUD, the U.S. Department of Transportation, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to coordinate regional investments in transportation, housing, and environmental protection. The two-part study includes—

1. A broad assessment of the civic engagement strategies of all 74 HUD SCI-RPG recipients.
2. A deep case study of Buffalo-Niagara, New York, an SCI grantee that has been nationally recognized for its civic engagement approach.

The study reveals opportunities and challenges in developing civic engagement strategies that strengthen civic infrastructure and build capacity for regional development of equitable, sustainable communities of opportunity.

## Overview: Civic Engagement and Regional Planning

Since the foundation of regional planning at the turn of the 20th century, under the leadership of Sir Patrick Geddes, civic engagement has been recognized for its potential to “release the creative responses of individuals toward solving modern urban problems” (Meller, 2005: 1). However, by the 1970s, the legitimacy of urban and regional planning was called into question, both for its failure to solve complex social and ecological problems and for its failure to uphold democratic ideals for participation in planning processes (Arnstein, 1969; Davidoff, 1965; Jacobs, 1961; Rittel and Webber, 1973). In response to the exclusion of people of color and low-income communities in public decisionmaking in the urban renewal era, movements for advocacy planning and community-based development emphasized that meaningful citizen participation and empowerment of marginalized communities is essential to legitimate planning practice (Arnstein, 1969; Checkoway, 1994; Davidoff, 2007; Jacobs, 1961). Top-down planning processes were called into question, and a participatory, communicative paradigm emerged in the planning field, asserting that good process is a precondition for good outcomes (Forester, 1999; Healey, 1992; Innes and Booher, 2010). Moreover, meaningful citizen involvement has been shown to strengthen the quality of plans

and increase the likelihood of their implementation (Beierle and Konisky, 2001; Burby, 2003). Although contemporary planners have debated the merits of top-down versus bottom-up planning processes, during the course of time, planners developed innovative approaches to public process design that integrate “expert” and “local” knowledge in diverse communities to build their capacity to address complex challenges (Innes and Booher, 2010). As sustainability scientist Donella Meadows emphasized, building the capacity for self-organization is one of the most powerful ways to intervene in the complex system of, for example, a region (Meadows, 1997). Since the turn of the 21st century, planners have been increasingly recognizing cities and regions as complex adaptive systems where strong civic networks and engagement processes are essential to planning for sustainability and resilience (Innes and Booher, 2010; Innes, Booher, and Di Vittorio, 2011; Innes and Rongerude, 2013).

Today, planning scholars and practitioners generally concur that meaningful public participation is needed to create equitable, informed, and transparent decisions with desirable social and ecological outcomes (Chapple and Mattiuzzi, 2013). Despite this general consensus, further research is needed to address the challenges of meaningful public participation in regional planning. Most literature has focused on civic engagement in planning processes led by individual municipalities or agencies. Less research has focused on the special challenges of civic engagement in regional planning involving diverse institutional decisionmakers and a wide array of stakeholders and communities in spatially segregated regions. Furthermore, although well-designed civic engagement activities can have positive outcomes, ad hoc, individual activities are not enough to support regional communities in creatively solving complex social and ecological challenges. Moreover, significant obstacles to meaningful participation persist. These obstacles include a lack of trust that participation makes a difference, a lack of social cohesion among diverse and economically stratified communities, and a basic lack of understanding of issues, policies, and decisionmaking processes among many citizens (Mandarano, 2015).

To support the meaningful participation of diverse stakeholders required for effective, adaptive governance, regions could invest in civic infrastructure to sustain meaningful civic engagement over time. For the purposes of this article, we build on Parr’s (1993: 93) general definition of civic infrastructure as “the invisible structures and processes through which the social contract is written and rewritten in communities.” This conception of civic infrastructure emphasizes an ongoing struggle, through formal and informal processes, to identify common goals and establish plans and agreements intended to meet individual and community needs and aspirations. These are the invisible structures and processes that build the capacity of communities to self-organize, learn, and adapt, drawing on the diversity of knowledge and experience within them. Moreover, successful communities recognize the interdependence among business, government, nonprofit organizations, and individual citizens (Parr, 2008).

Although Parr’s definition emphasizes the invisibility of these social structures and processes, civic infrastructure can be designed to serve social needs just like other infrastructure. Key building blocks of civic infrastructure are civic engagement activities. Although a single civic engagement activity like an open house meeting may not significantly support adaptive management, when initiated as part of a holistically designed process, these activities build social capital (Larsen et al., 2004) and strengthen civic infrastructure that supports democratic governance and collective,

creative problemsolving. The concept of civic infrastructure also emphasizes the importance of cross-sector partnerships for community problem solving. Recently, many scholars have explored multisectoral collaboration across jurisdictional boundaries through related concepts of collaborative governance and collective impact (Innes and Booher, 2010; Innes, Booher, and Di Vittorio, 2011; Innes and Rongerude, 2013; Kania and Kramer, 2011, 2013).

Unfortunately, federal investments in regional planning in the urban renewal era damaged existing civic infrastructure instead of strengthening it. Investments in transportation and housing infrastructure initiated a coupled process of clearing “blighted” neighborhoods and expanding single-family, sprawling suburban developments. This process eroded the social fabric of existing urban neighborhoods, impeded social capital formation in suburbia, and established spatially segregated metropolitan regions that exaggerated social inequality and ecological degradation (Bullard, 2007; Jacobs, 1961; Parr, 2008; Putnam, 2000).

Reflecting on this history, what is the potential for the federal government to couple investments in civic infrastructure and physical infrastructure to support equitable, sustainable regional planning? Can federal investments from the top support meaningful engagement of diverse regional stakeholders and historically marginalized communities in civic engagement processes? How can regional planners design their civic engagement strategies to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with, and empower diverse stakeholders to collectively advance an equitable, sustainable future?

## Research Questions and Overview of Approach

Given the opportunities and challenges involved in meaningful civic engagement and regional planning, we conducted a study of civic engagement activities used in regional planning efforts of the 74 regional communities that received federal planning grants from SCI. The study investigates the core question: how can regional planners design their civic engagement strategies to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with, and empower diverse stakeholders to collectively advance an equitable, sustainable future? This section presents—

- A justification for selection of the 74 HUD SCI-RPG recipients (regional grantees) for the case study.
- An overview of the two-part research design.
- A summary of the assessment framework used to structure the analysis.

### Justification of Selection of 74 SCI Regional Grantees for Study

The 74 regions supported by SCI are ideal for study because SCI represents efforts by the federal government to take a comprehensive approach to regional planning that integrates top-down and bottom-up processes and couples investments in physical infrastructure with civic infrastructure.

SCI actively supported grantees in developing comprehensive participation strategies by providing funding for inclusive public processes and technical support in civic engagement. Supported by the federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities, the Sustainable Communities Learning

Network's workshops and resource library helped grantees develop their capacity to design innovative processes to engage community members from all sectors, especially traditionally marginalized and underrepresented communities.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, HUD required that a minimum of 10 percent of grant budgets be committed to increase the engagement of historically marginalized communities.<sup>2</sup>

The technical assistance provided to SCI regional grantees directly addresses the challenges of designing civic engagement for regional planning to advance equitable, sustainable communities of opportunity. Bergstrom et al. (2012: 2) revealed the special emphasis the federal initiative placed on civic engagement and equity.

Community engagement is the foundation of the Sustainable Communities Initiative. Community engagement fosters the transformative relationships and increased ownership necessary to build sustainable communities of opportunity. Community engagement deepens the innovative, silo-busting partnerships that are signatures of the program by connecting the concerns of communities to the decisions that allocate local and regional public investment dollars. Engagement brings meaning and relevance to sustainability goals across a broad spectrum of players; and it encourages local innovations in sustainable development through creative problem solving. (Bergstrom et al., 2012: 2)

The emphasis on transformative relationships and sustainable communities of opportunity reflects SCI's intent to overcome the legacy of past institutional practices of segregation, racial exclusion, urban disinvestment, and regional housing and transportation investments that established segregated, sprawling regions. Recognizing the geographically dispersed nature of regional planning and the tendency of suburban areas to have more influence, SCI encouraged grantees to "provide leaders of low-income communities and communities of color from across a metropolitan area the opportunity to identify their common issues, interests and needs, and to develop alliances to collectively address regional decisions" (Bergstrom et al., 2012: 3). Moreover, SCI defines community engagement as a capacity-building process "through which community members are empowered to own the change they want to see and involves communication, problem-solving, governance, decision-making skills and strategies" (Bergstrom et al., 2012: 4).

The training grantees received underscored the importance of designing a comprehensive, ongoing approach to engagement that serves multiple engagement functions over time including informing, consulting, involving, collaborating, and empowering. These five vital functions are the focus of the International Association for Public Participation's (IAP2's) Spectrum of Participation (Snyder, 2013).

The SCI grantees were ideal to study, given our interest in understanding the challenges and opportunities for federal investments in regional planning to support civic infrastructure and our specific research question: investigating the potential of regional planners to develop civic engagement strategies to inform, consult, involve, and empower diverse stakeholders to collaboratively develop equitable, sustainable communities of opportunity. Moreover, because these regional communities

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<sup>1</sup> This learning network's resource library is available to partners online at <http://www.scllearningnetwork.org/>.

<sup>2</sup> As reported in Bergstrom et al. (2012), this budget commitment was required on page 57 of the Notice of Funding Availability for HUD's Fiscal Year 2011 Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program, released by HUD in 2011.

were given technical and financial assistance to develop civic engagement plans, we were able to control for the variables of access to funding and knowledge of innovative practices. With financial and technical support, this sample includes best practices in public process design.

## Overview of Two-Part Research Design

We designed the study to provide a breadth of understanding through a comprehensive inventory and assessment of all civic engagement activities used across the 74 regions in the study. Recognizing that a holistic approach to an extensive civic engagement process is required to build regional capacity and enduring civic infrastructure, we coupled this assessment with a deep study of one exemplary region. The Buffalo-Niagara region's One Region Forward (1RF) planning process was selected based on three criteria: (1) 1RF was nationally recognized for its public outreach, receiving the National Planning Achievement Award for Public Outreach from the American Planning Association; (2) the University at Buffalo's School of Architecture and Planning primarily led the civic engagement effort, providing an opportunity to study the role of anchor institutions in civic engagement; and (3) the research team is based in Buffalo and could conduct in-person focus groups and interviews with past participants.

## Summary of Assessment Framework for Civic Engagement Strategies

Both the broad study of 74 grantees and the deep study of the Buffalo-Niagara region use a standardized classification for civic engagement activities based on the IAP2 spectrum (exhibit 1).

Our classification offers definitions for five functions of civic engagement activities, instead of levels on a hierarchical ladder of participation.<sup>3</sup> These five functions represent the various forms of interaction among planners and other participants in planning processes. The IAP2 model recognizes that strategies can inform, consult, involve, collaborate with, and empower community members from different sectors. All these functions should be part of a comprehensive, democratic participation approach. A single engagement strategy could be designed and implemented in a way to achieve all five of these functions.

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<sup>3</sup> Susan Arnstein's classic ladder of participation is traditionally used to assess the quality and impact of public participation and has been used to evaluate SCI-supported engagement activities (Chapple and Mattiuzzi, 2013). Instead, we chose to use an adaptation of IAP2's functional categories for several reasons. Arnstein's eight-rung ladder focuses on power distribution between two entities (the state and the public) with a linear progression in participation, from manipulation of the public by the state (rung 1) to citizen control over decisionmaking (rung 8; Arnstein, 1969). The theory implies that lower rungs are undemocratic and oppressive. While the ladder helps bring attention to power tensions between the state and the public, it has significant limitations for the analysis of the civic engagement strategies required in complex regions with multisectoral stakeholders. While Arnstein's ladder may suggest that imparting information (a mode of building human capital) is less "democratic" than opportunities for collaboration and empowerment, the IAP2 Spectrum of Public Participation recognizes that effective engagement must be multifaceted.

## Exhibit 1

### Functional Categories of Civic Engagement Activities

IAP2 Category	Functional Definitions of Activity Categories Adapted from IAP2 Spectrum
Inform	The activity provides the public with balanced and objective information that advances transparency and assists community members in understanding the problems, alternatives, opportunities, and solutions. Examples include fact sheets, websites, and open houses.
Consult	The activity obtains input from the public on analysis, alternatives, and decisions. Examples include public comment, focus groups, surveys, and public meetings.
Involve	The activity enables two-way communication between individual members of the public and the public sector decision makers; planners and public officials work directly with the public to ensure their concerns are voiced, understood, and considered.
Collaborate	The activity supports cross-sector partnership building, cultivation of social capital, and collaborative problemsolving and innovation.
Empower	This activity builds the capacity of agents of change (individuals, organizations, and so on) to advance a common vision and a collective impact. Individuals act on collective will, as if joined as one.

*IAP2 = International Association for Public Participation.*

*Source: Classification modified by authors based on IAP2's spectrum of participation ([http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations\\_course/IAP2\\_P2\\_Spectrum\\_FINAL.pdf](http://c.ymcdn.com/sites/www.iap2.org/resource/resmgr/foundations_course/IAP2_P2_Spectrum_FINAL.pdf))*

Given the context of regional planning, we adapted IAP2 definitions for “collaborate” and “empower” to better reflect the opportunities for cultivating empowered participation across diverse populations and sectors to address complex regional challenges. In the IAP2 spectrum, *collaborate* means that the agency and the public work as partners. Because regional planning involves multiple agencies and diverse stakeholders, our definition emphasized building social capital as a requirement for collaborative efforts. In the IAP2 spectrum, *empower* is defined as “place final decision-making in the hands of the public” (Snyder, 2013:13). Instead, our definition of *empower* emphasizes building community capacity to advance collective vision for an equitable, sustainable region. This definition was consistent with the definition of empowerment given by Bergstrom et al. (2012).

## Broad Study: Review of Civic Engagement Strategies of 74 SCI-RPG Program Grantees

To conduct the civic engagement strategy census, the research team first conducted an inventory of all civic engagement strategies publicized on the websites of each of the 74 regions that received SCI-RPG. The team then classified all grantee engagement activities using the five IAP2 categories of civic engagement, recorded any evidence that the activity continued in the implementation phase and noted the extent to which activities appeared to advance equity. Raters went through multiple rounds of norming and quality control checks to ensure consistent classification. Interrater reliability was high for classifying inform and consult but decreased for involve, collaborate, and empower.

## Inventory Results

The results of the inventory and categorization of civic engagement activities employed by SCI regional grantees suggest that—

- Most activities serve to inform participants, whereas relatively few activities serve to empower them (see exhibit 2).
- Many regions employed a diverse range of activities—each with their own functions—that were often integrated into an overarching engagement plan.
- Some regions provided innovations on traditional activity types that expanded the function from only informing or consulting to also involving, collaborating, and empowering.
- Some regions provided innovations that informed and consulted stakeholders more equitably and powerfully than past methods.

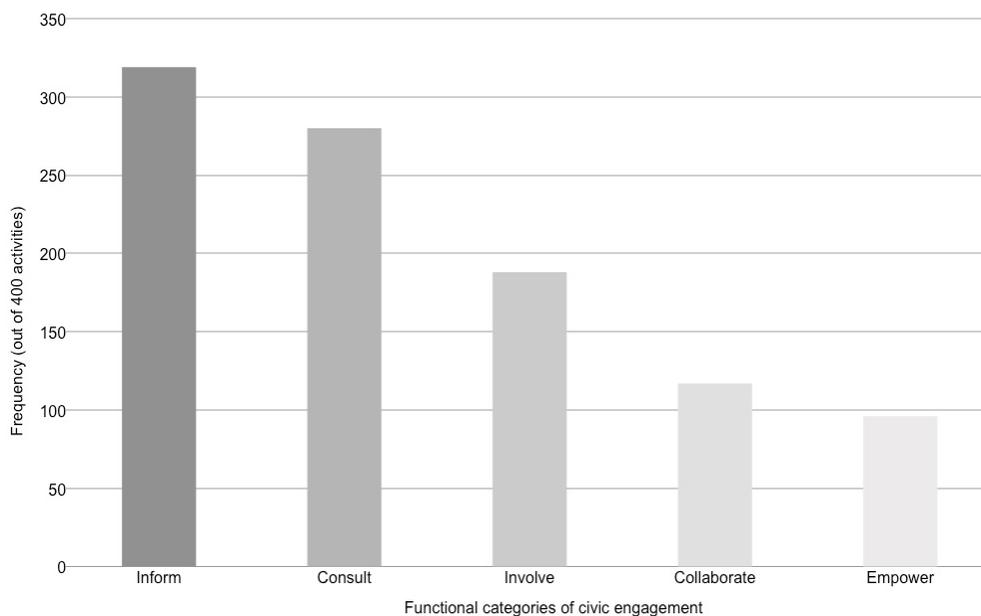
Most regions went beyond traditional civic engagement activities and designed more comprehensive plans for civic engagement that integrated a range of activities to inform, consult, involve, collaborate, and empower. However, the range was significant in the sophistication of these strategies, both in the selection and design of individual tools and the art of assembling them into a holistic strategy for engagement.

### Exhibit 2

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Distribution of Observed Engagement Activities Across the Five IAP2 Categories

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*IAP2 = International Association for Public Participation.*

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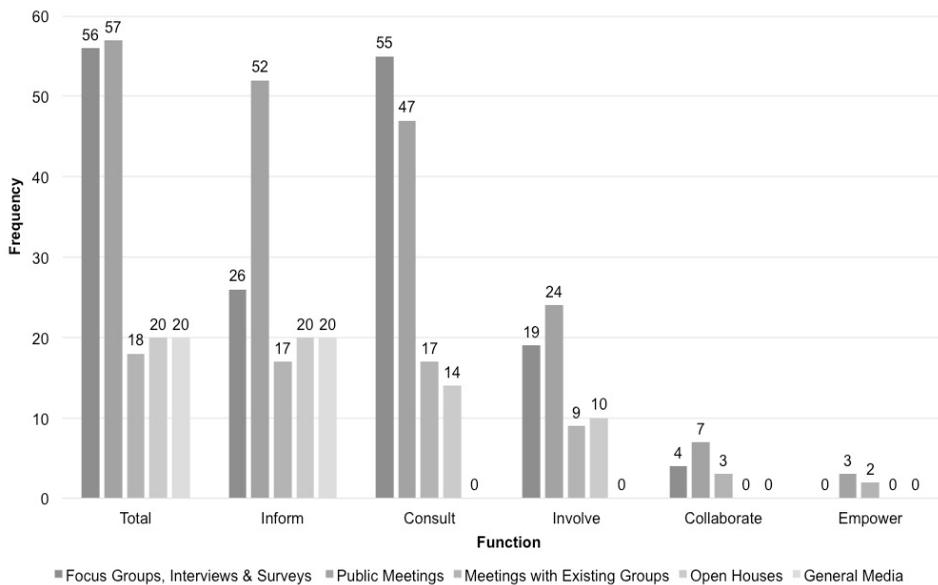
In the following, we present bar charts summarizing the IAP2 classifications for various types of engagement strategies. Bar charts are complemented by selected examples drawn from the regional cases. Each type of activity achieves a range of engagement.<sup>4</sup>

### Traditional Outreach and Engagement Activities

This metacategory encompasses some of the most commonly used forms of community engagement, which we coded as, “Focus Groups, Interviews & Surveys,”<sup>5</sup> “Public Meetings,”<sup>6</sup> “Meetings with Existing Groups,”<sup>7</sup> “Open Houses,”<sup>8</sup> and “General Media.”<sup>9</sup> As exhibit 3 shows, most of these

#### Exhibit 3

Frequency and Function of Traditional Outreach and Engagement Activities



<sup>4</sup> The regional websites and HUD documents are generally only cited in the article in the case of direct quotations. However, they are available through correspondence with the primary author.

<sup>5</sup> The code Focus Groups, Interviews & Surveys was used for traditional qualitative research approaches designed to gather feedback from the community. Retrospectively, surveys should have been a code for their own sake, as they are designed only for consulting.

<sup>6</sup> The code Public Meetings includes educational meetings (for example, informal speaker series and topic-focused summits designed to increase human capital), as well as traditional public meetings in which the public is informed and then has an opportunity to speak their opinions.

<sup>7</sup> The code Meetings with Existing Groups was originally intended to distinguish between large, general public meetings and meetings targeted for particular community groups, either formal organizations (who often could request a presentation by planners) or demographic groups. This code also came to be used for efforts to bring meetings to where people are, such as hosting a table at a popular event.

<sup>8</sup> The code Open Houses was used to capture events where participants got to explore regional planning issues by visiting stations based on their interests and, oftentimes, engaging with planners at those stations. Sometimes plans simply mentioned open house without describing them. In these cases they were still coded as Open Houses.

<sup>9</sup> General media broadly captured the efforts of regions to publicize the planning process and educate the public on planning issues through a wide array of media.

activities focused on one-way communication, either gathering input, from the public to the planners (consult), or providing updates, from the planners to the public (inform). Unidirectional information exchange does not imply that activities are necessarily less well designed.

Innovative practices for informing and consulting mostly focused on expanding the total number and diversity of people involved in the process. For instance, many activities coded as Meetings with Existing Groups were designed to “meet people where they are.” This code was interpreted liberally, including hosting tables or kiosks at a diverse range of well-attended community functions (for example, community festivals or concerts, grocery stores, restaurants, schools, or community centers) or developing a travelling road show to reach communities dispersed through regions. Many regions also effectively used various forms of media to reach underrepresented populations by providing translated materials and targeting culturally specific media outlets. A few regions developed informational videos and broadcasted them on mainstream media outlets. In the Sacramento region, public engagement began with focus groups that deliberately engaged a more diverse group of stakeholders than in previous regional transportation planning efforts and focused on issues of equity and inclusion. Focus groups sought input from marginalized communities such as low-income, senior, youth, disabled, and minority groups, and stakeholder groups representing diverse constituencies and interests in the region.

Some innovative activities created opportunities for two-way or multidirectional communication. For instance, four regions held focus groups that functioned more like mini-workshops, designed to enable participants to learn and network with each other. For example, focus groups for Together North Jersey’s Bloomfield Corridor Plans included a “dot-mocracy” mapping exercise that enabled the group to deliberate together about opportunities to increase access, awareness, health, and safety along the corridor. Several regions included live keypad polling in their public meetings to enable greater involvement and more effective real-time deliberation. The Southeast Florida Regional Partnership’s Prosperity Plan, Seven50, used a variety of innovations to turn a traditional public meeting into a highly engaging, ongoing process of learning and deliberation about the future of the region. The Seven50 process included summits for the general public that included keynote speakers on critical regional issues, interactive workshops, and opportunities to participate in live keypad polls.

Interestingly, the General Media category included a range of artistic practices, public art, and creative placemaking initiatives. In Chittenden County, Vermont, planners used community-created murals, community portraits, and youth creative writing as means to explore peoples’ ideas and feelings about the institutions they interact with and their surroundings. In the region surrounding Greenfield, Massachusetts, the Franklin Regional Council of Governments commissioned a public art display as a capstone to the public participation efforts. The art display was unveiled in a ceremony at the Franklin County Transit Center, which included choreographed dance and music performed by youth. The council created large posters of the mosaic, which were attached to the sides of the Franklin Regional Transit Authority buses for several weeks during the public comment period for the draft of the Sustainable Franklin County Plan, in order to help publicize it and future open houses. South Florida’s Broward metropolitan planning organization (MPO) created a short promotional video about transportation planning to be shown in movie theatre previews. It introduced the purpose of an MPO in long-term transportation planning, and encouraged viewers to participate in the future planning of their city. Most of these artistic activities had traditional

engagement classifications—none of the activity codes captured arts-based activities—and the IAP2 categories failed to capture the role of these activities in creating cultural capital and a sense of place and belonging.

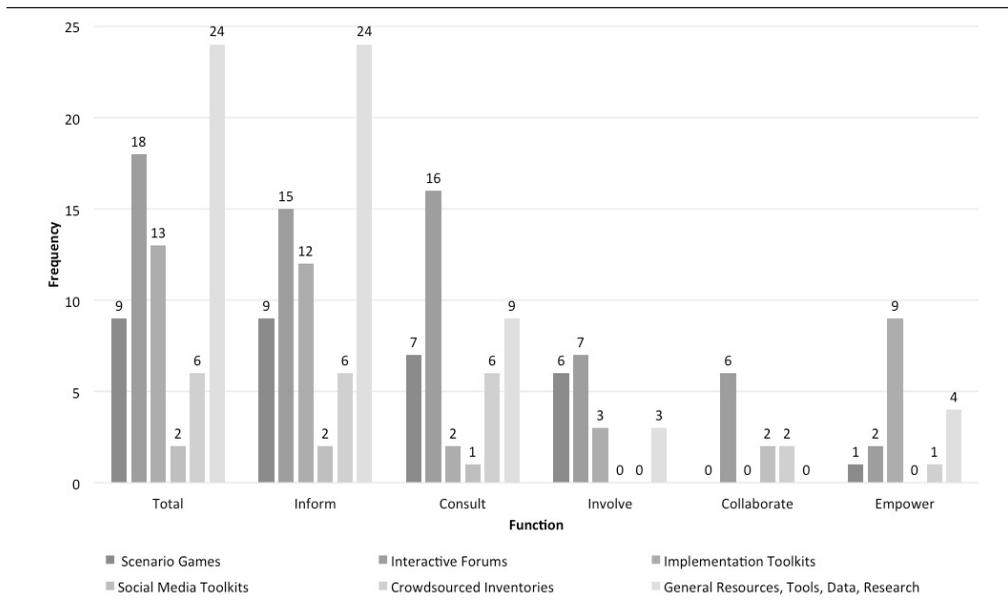
## Websites and Online Engagement

Many of the regions made effective use of innovations in web-based technologies to inform, consult, involve, and even empower and collaborate with citizens and organizations from various sectors. This metacategory included the following web-based activity codes: “Scenario Games”; “Interactive Forums”; “Implementation Toolkits”;<sup>10</sup> “Social Media Toolkits”;<sup>11</sup> “Crowdsourced Inventories”; and “General Resources, Tools, Data, Research.”<sup>12</sup>

As exhibit 4 shows, nearly all of the websites and online tools served to inform citizens, many consulted citizens, and far fewer served to involve, collaborate, or empower them. Nearly all the

### Exhibit 4

#### Frequency and Function of Websites and Online Engagement Tools



<sup>10</sup> Many regions posted Implementation Toolkits on their websites. These toolkits were generally sets of policy tools and strategies that towns could adopt in their efforts to implement the regional plan’s vision, goals, and objectives.

<sup>11</sup> The coding results for this category are slightly difficult to interpret due to interrater reliability challenges. Most grantees appeared to have some type of social media presence, but this was underreported in the inventory because of a choice to create a category focused on social media toolkits—and not just “social media”—designed to make it easy and desirable for community members to share updates and invitations through social media. It seemed that this was not happening, and social media seemed mostly to be a place for passive updates: not networking or interactive dialogue. More often, social media efforts were included as a tool under the “general resources” website classification.

<sup>12</sup> This category was a catchall for web resources that did not fit neatly into other categories. Generally, researchers appear to have only used this category when they have wanted to highlight an interesting tool or resource, and they classified it under the larger umbrella.

regional grantees had attractive websites with information about the planning process. Innovative, interactive web-based forums ranged from dynamically updating spreadsheets to interactive interfaces, such as Community PlanIt, MindMixer, or Ideascale. For instance, Imagine Central Arkansas employed Ideascale, an online, community-sourced forum for sharing, discussing, and rating ideas for sustainable placemaking, to reach a geographically diverse community in an interactive manner. Interfaces sometimes featured crowdsourced inventories, enabling dynamic asset mapping, needs identification, ideation, or a combination of the three through the region. New River Valley Livability in Virginia even included a crowdsourced financing mechanism for implementation through a partnership with a local community foundation, which raised more than \$60,000 in donations to implement ideas in the regional plan.

Web-based scenario games enabled professional planners to provide a more powerful, data-intensive interface in public meetings. For example, Utah and the Central Texas region used the Envision Tomorrow suite of web-based scenario planning support tools to provide snapshots of the possible impacts of policies, development decisions, and current growth trajectories to develop a shared vision of a sustainable future. The web-based platform integrates pop-up information windows that explain the theory and underlying research behind each indicator, explaining how the measures are connected to livability concerns, as well as providing design solutions via hyperlink text to online resources. Some regions offered interactive mapping platforms on their websites for the general public to use, such as MyVibrant NEO in the northeastern Ohio region.

### **In-Person, Interactive Workshops**

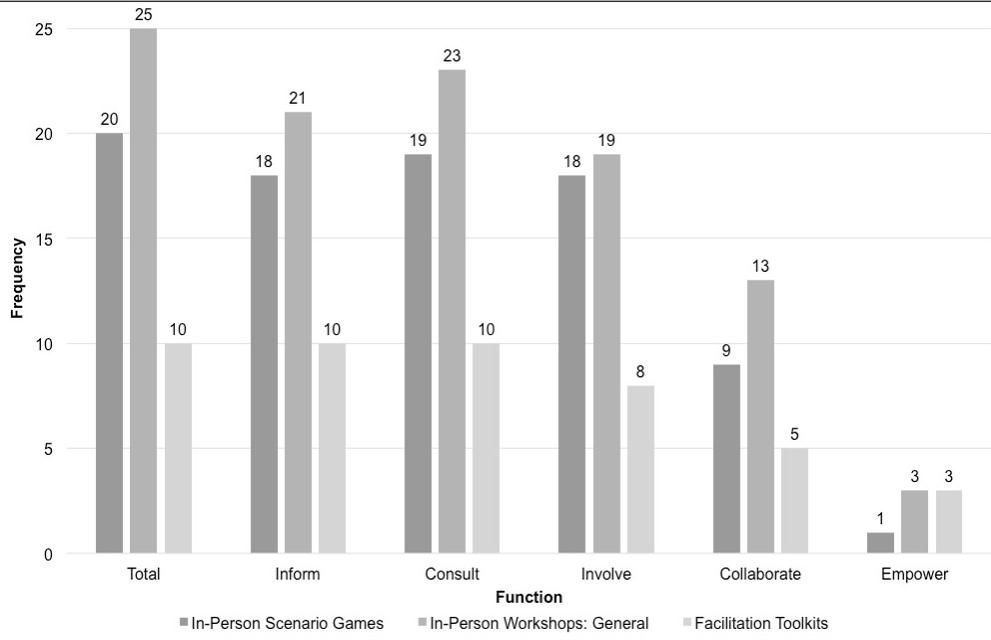
Beyond the traditional two-way, larger, general public meetings, grantees often used many hands-on engaging interactive workshops that enabled participants to engage with one another in smaller groups. This metacategory included the following workshops: “In-Person Scenario Games,” “In-Person Workshops: General,” and “Facilitation Toolkits.” Exhibit 5 shows the frequency of interactive workshop activities in each of these categories and the functions they served.

In-person scenario game workshops generally involved participants working in small groups situated around a regional map and deliberating together on land use, housing, and transportation choices for various future scenarios. For example, in northeastern Ohio, nearly 600 individuals participated in a series of six workshops that produced 73 maps. These interactive activities created opportunities for participants to expand their knowledge and know-how, while also building new relationships, thereby expanding human and social capital. Although these highly interactive workshops enabled people to collaborate with each other in the exercise, they generally did not appear to build the power to act. The only workshop that appeared to empower participants was an interactive workshop designed for local officials across the region. Although the activity did not empower disadvantaged groups, it did build capacity among decisionmakers to act more effectively in service of a common regional vision.

The number, frequency, geographical diversity, and linguistic diversity of these smaller group activities were limited by the availability of planning professionals to lead them. Some regions saw that they could address this problem, while simultaneously strengthening civic infrastructure in the regions, by developing a distributed approach. Through “Meetings in A Box,” “Convo to Go,” and “Ambassador” programs, regions equipped civic leaders with tools (and often training) to lead

**Exhibit 5**

**Frequency and Function of In-Person, Interactive Workshops**



smaller interactive workshops and conversations with stakeholders in their own circles. Instead of requiring people to come to a central location, public conversations could be hosted around a living room table, a coffee hour at a church, or any other ongoing meeting. This flexibility was especially valuable for geographically and socially diverse regions where centralized meetings are particularly difficult. Western North Carolina’s Community Road Trips Toolkit was developed for individuals and organizations interested in hosting small-format interactive meetings in under-represented or remote areas of the region. Grant funding was also available through an application process to support those individuals and organizations. Materials provided included a video introduction, a flipbook for review of the plan and prior community meetings, and instructions for process facilitation.

**Capacity-Building Activities**

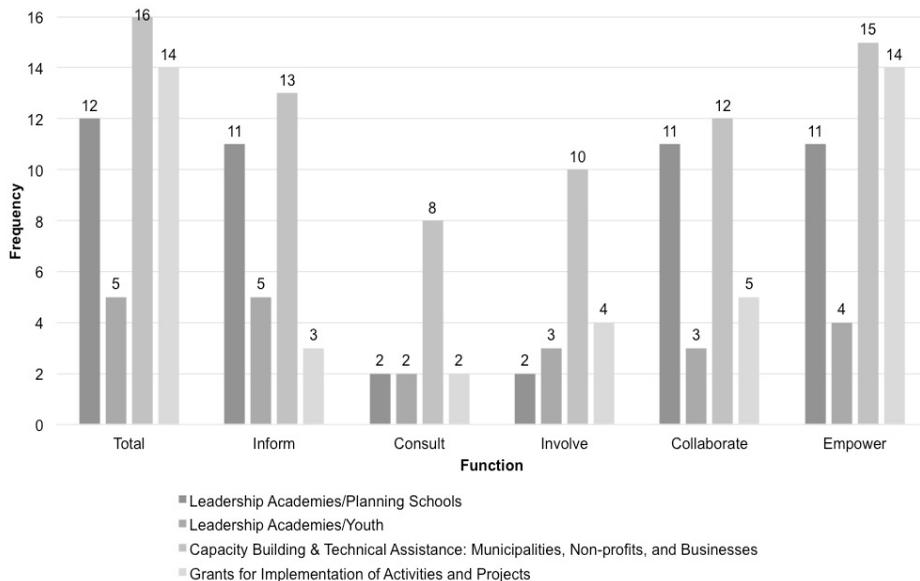
While most activities primarily intended to support the decisionmaking process for the plan, a wide range of activities were specifically intended to build capacity in the region for a more just, inclusive, and effective planning process and for long-term capacity for implementation and sustained democratic engagement. This metacategory of “Capacity-Building Activities” included

four activity types: “Leadership Academies/Planning Schools,”<sup>13</sup> “Leadership Academies/Youth,”<sup>14</sup> “Capacity Building & Technical Assistance: Municipalities, Non-profits, and Businesses,”<sup>15</sup> and “Grants for Implementation of Activities and Projects.”<sup>16</sup> Exhibit 6 shows the frequency of capacity-building activities in each of these categories and the functions they served.

Leadership academies, such as Des Moines, Iowa’s Urban Ambassadors and Houston’s Community Ambassador Team, supported local leaders with trainings and tools to use in the planning process for their communities and organizations. Leadership academies in some regions focused on training and involving youth as community leaders in the planning process. For example, the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning supports the region’s Future Leaders in Planning (FLIP)

**Exhibit 6**

**Frequency and Function of Capacity-Building Activities**



<sup>13</sup> Citizen planning academies were intended to empower citizens to meaningfully participate in the ongoing planning process, usually by building human and social capital. The code was generally reserved for regions that offered a series of educational and networking events framed as an academy, school, or institute similar to those defined and reviewed by Mandarano (2015). However, some raters also used this classification for ad hoc capacity-building workshops targeted for citizens.

<sup>14</sup> This code was used to identify activities designed to support the empowered participation of youth, especially school-age youth, but also sometimes college students and young professionals. When interpreting this code, it is important to note that the research team noted special efforts to engage youth in 16 regions, even though only five activities were coded specifically as “Leadership Academies/Youth.” This topic will be discussed at the conclusion of this section.

<sup>15</sup> This code was intended to capture capacity-building efforts for organizations (not only citizens), but it overlapped some with Leadership Academies/Planning Schools. It is helpful to consider all these groups collectively.

<sup>16</sup> Some regions provided capacity-building grants to community groups, either to support them in implementing public participation activities or to complete demonstration projects related to plan implementation. Because funds for project implementation are not generally included in reports on community engagement processes, the totals reported here should not be interpreted as an exhaustive survey of implementation grants.

program. Through it, high school residents are taught, during an intensive 8-month period, about relevant urban planning issues. FLIP participants partner with civic leaders, engage in policy discussions, and advocate for regional planning techniques.

Some regions used SCI funding to provide capacity building, technical assistance, and implementation grants to advance projects that supported the regional planning process. The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning established the Local Technical Assistance program with support from the Chicago Community Trust to initiate and invest in 112 projects with local governments, nonprofits, and intergovernmental organizations to address local issues at the intersection of transportation, land use, and housing. Together North Jersey's nongovernmental organization [NGO] Micro-Grant Program awarded eight grants ranging from \$15,000 to \$20,000 each to community-based NGOs with demonstrated ties to traditionally underrepresented neighborhoods of the North New Jersey region. Those organizations included community development corporations as well as social service and faith-based institutions. The grants were intended to facilitate and supplement the regional plan's outreach efforts in those areas, and any remaining funds were to be used for local planning activities related to neighborhood revitalization, active transportation and active living, and capacity building.

### **Infrastructure for Collective Action**

Many of the activities described in the Capacity-Building Activities section were ongoing elements of the regions' civic infrastructure. The metacategory "Infrastructure for Collective Action" refers to organizational structures intended to support the planning and implementation processes, thereby enabling the region's diverse stakeholders to make, remake, and implement the social contract established by the plans. The metacategory includes "Citizen Advisory Committees and Working Groups"<sup>17</sup> and "Compacts" through which regional partners signed on to advance the adopted plan as a whole.<sup>18</sup> For example, East Tennessee established working groups comprised of residents who have special expertise and interest in a regional planning issue. The working group members produced research and advised the Plan East Tennessee leadership team on topics related to housing and transit. Omaha, Nebraska's Heartland Vision Regional Compact is a pledge by regional public and private stakeholders to continue working together beyond the planning phase to address the key issues facing the region. Local governments, agencies, businesses, and nonprofits that sign the compact are required to participate in plan implementation committees and attend semiannual plan implementation summits. Exhibit 7 shows the frequency of activities in both of these categories, as well as the functions they served.

When considering the functional ratings for Citizen Advisory Committees and Working Groups and for Compacts in the following, it is important to remember that the definition of empower used in this analysis focuses on building the capacity of diverse actors to act effectively in service of shared

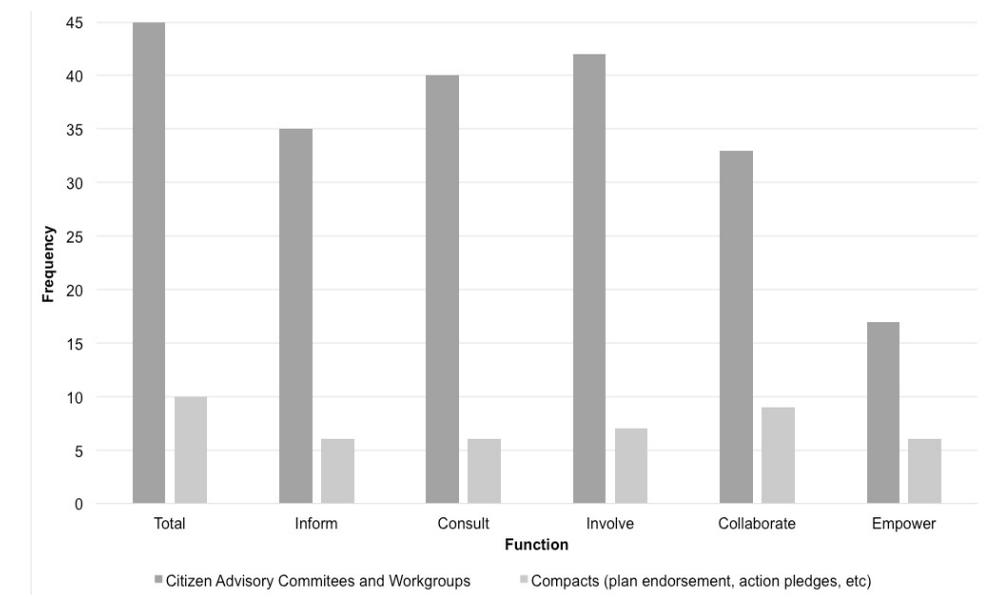
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<sup>17</sup> This code was used to capture authentic citizen participation in ongoing advisory roles and issue-specific working groups committed to collective action in key areas.

<sup>18</sup> It is best to interpret these activity types together and to recognize that (1) Citizen Advisory Committees and Working Groups may overly suggest robust, inclusive participation by citizens and (2) Compacts may underreport stakeholder commitments to regional plans.

**Exhibit 7**

**Frequency and Function of Infrastructure for Collective Action**



vision. It does not necessarily imply addressing structural inequality by giving (or building) power to underrepresented groups in particular, even if such affirmative action is needed to truly build capacity among diverse actors.

**Excellence in Equitable, Integrated Approaches to Civic Infrastructure Planning**

The inventory results also revealed some regions that stood out for their use of a variety of activities integrated into a synergistic, comprehensive engagement process intended to address structural barriers to opportunity and engagement in demographically and geographically diverse regions. For all but 31 of the 74 regions, researchers classified at least 5 different engagement activity types. Researchers also anecdotally noted 55 activities that made clear efforts to advance equity, both by engaging members of marginalized communities and by focusing public attention on issues of structural inequality.

Four regions demonstrated exemplary efforts to creatively design coupled investments in civic infrastructure and physical infrastructure to advance equity outcomes. The Southeast Michigan region’s Green Infrastructure Vision used an interactive mobile theatre program called “Did You See It Coming” to engage diverse community members and build their capacity to address challenging issues including transit, education, clean water, and housing. Seattle, Washington’s Puget Sound Regional Council, Minneapolis, Minnesota’s Corridors for Opportunity, and the Denver Regional Council of Governments’ MetroVision plan all meaningfully engaged diverse community members in the design of regional transit and housing corridors that would advance economically and ecologically sustainable development and ensure that people of all incomes and backgrounds could share in the resulting opportunities. Each of these regions leveraged their

existing civic infrastructure by providing capacity-building grants to community-based organizations, establishing regional equity networks, and offering empowering workshops and summits.

These regions and others engaged in holistic, equitable design of the civic engagement process to expand the region's capacity to address structural barriers to opportunity and engagement in demographically and geographically diverse regions. Some were particularly committed to building capacity in marginalized communities through a holistically designed engagement process. Baltimore's Opportunity Collective stands out in these efforts and warrants a closer look.

Baltimore's Opportunity Collaborative employed a comprehensive engagement approach focused on building the capacity of regional partners and citizens to address the challenges posed by racial and spatial barriers to opportunity in the region.

Their approach focused on socially just processes for engagement as well as socially just outcomes and implementation. In alignment with SCI's emphasis on the "geographies of opportunity" framework of the Kirwan Institute, they incorporated participatory "opportunity mapping" exercises in public workshops. Not only did this give participants a common frame of reference to work from, it also was helpful in generating measurable outcomes and targets. A partnership with the Citizens Planning and Housing Association, Inc., an organization that has been supporting civic action in the region for more than 60 years, helped them engage underrepresented populations directly or indirectly through other advocacy or service organizations. More than 6,000 citizens engaged in the process. Baltimore's emphasis on movement building to support implementation and outcomes is also reflected in its Opportunity Fellows Leadership Development Program and demonstration grants.

Baltimore's Opportunity Fellows program engaged 34 residents in a leadership development program beginning in 2014, toward the end of the planning process, with the intention of cultivating community leaders who would steward the plan through implementation. The fellows attended retreats and workshops to learn about regional issues related to transportation, housing, workforce development, economic competitiveness, and community trusteeship. The program culminated in a three-part capstone community project that reviewed the regional plan, their program, and opportunities for the future. In February 2016, participants of the Opportunity Fellows program self-organized to form the Opportunity Coalition, a new group that intends to further implementation of the regional plans that were developed by the Opportunity Collaborative but with an added emphasis on the environment and environmental justice.

Demonstration and workforce development grants were used to road test sustainability initiatives and build capacity during the planning process. Baltimore's plan development consortium, the Opportunity Collaborative, awarded \$750,000 in demonstration grants to 16 organizations involved in making the region more sustainable in the areas of transportation, housing, and workforce development. These grants were awarded throughout the planning phase.

### **Observations on Implementation Phase Engagement**

The results of the inventory revealed that very few of the grantees published clear plans for ongoing involvement. Of the 400 civic engagement activities surveyed, less than 10 percent (36 activities) showed explicit evidence of continuation in the implementation phase, although about 13

percent (53 activities) demonstrated an explicit intention, and 12 percent (48 activities) included tools and resources that were still available on websites. Although nearly all the regions had active websites, very few included active ways for citizens at-large or organizations to get involved in implementation. Funding through SCI supported production of attractive videos and websites, adoption of technological tools, and grants for outreach by community-based organizations. In regions where these are not priority investments of MPOs, philanthropic foundations, or other anchor institutions, these activities appear unlikely to continue. Moreover, the return on these investments and their sustainability will be limited in regions where civic infrastructure is weak to begin with. Civic engagement activities were more likely to continue in the implementation phase in regions where a culture of civic engagement, engaged anchor institution(s), well-established community-based organization(s), movements for socially just and environmentally responsible regional development, or a combination of the four was already established.

### **Conclusions of the SCI Civic Engagement Activity Inventory**

The broad review of the 74 SCI-RPG program grantees revealed that SCI regional grantees employed a wide variety of civic engagement strategies to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with, and empower diverse stakeholders in their efforts to advance a sustainable future for the region. Through innovative civic engagement activities and thoughtfully designed comprehensive civic engagement plans, many regions succeeded in developing innovative practices to advance three important outcomes—

- Creating meaningful opportunities for diverse stakeholders to participate in processes to plan the future of their region.
- Building the capacity of communities to participate fully in the co-creation of a sustainable future, from planning through implementation and ongoing adaptation.
- Going beyond incidental, ad hoc engagement activities to invest in ongoing civic infrastructure in the region.

With regard to the third outcome, the results demonstrated efforts by many regions to design equitable, comprehensive, and innovative civic engagement plans that would support ongoing civic engagement. Many of these regions did so by leveraging the strength of their existing civic infrastructure. To better understand how such comprehensive approaches work in practice, the next section presents the results of a rich case study of the process developed by New York's Buffalo-Niagara region.

### **Deep Case Study: Buffalo-Niagara Region, New York**

IRE, the sustainability plan for the Buffalo-Niagara region, stands out among these SCI regional grantees for having incorporated a rich variety of civic engagement strategies in its multiyear planning and implementation processes. More than 700 organizations and more than 5,000 citizens engaged in the shaping of the plan, with 28 percent of participants from high-poverty ZIP Codes. The region now benefits from a community-driven plan, a growing collective impact network

committed to its implementation, a range of sustained learning programs and tools for distributed action, and a continuously growing populace that is informed about issues of regional cooperation and sustainability.

## Inventory

This section presents the 1RF case study, with a special focus on its Citizen Planning School (CPS) and Champions for Change programs. In the spring of 2016, six focus groups were conducted with 20 program participants, followed by 10 intensive interviews with Champions for Change graduates in the summer of 2016. It includes a tabular inventory of civic engagement strategies employed by 1RF as recorded in the SCI inventory (exhibit 8). A discussion of insights about the strengths and weaknesses of this integrated approach, based on focus groups and interviews, follows exhibit 8.

### Exhibit 8

#### Inventory of 1RF Civic Engagement Strategies (1 of 3)

Engagement Strategies		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Implement
Surveys, focus groups, and interviews							
Text it Forward surveys	1RF used a text message survey campaign to capture public sentiment and distributed it at bus shelters and in community centers. 1RF designed the surveys to be informative as well as to gather input.	X	X	0	0	0	NE
Public meetings, public comment							
Community Congresses with Poll-Everywhere	1RF held large public forums where conveners shared results on community preferences from prior activities, and citizens gave live feedback, both through conversation and the Poll-Everywhere live polling program. Live feedback enabled two-way communication between officials and the public, but the main function was to inform and consult.	X	X	0	0	0	NE
Meetings with existing groups							
Presentations to local organizations	Planners on the engagement team gave more than 50 presentations to local municipalities or community groups. Presentations created opportunities for two-way communication, although the function was mostly to inform and consult the community.	X	X	0	0	0	NE
Tabling at community events	By tabling at more than 30 community events, fairs, and local ethnic and neighborhood festivals, 1RF leaders engaged people who do not typically get involved in planning. Beyond tabling, 1RF leaders brought games and interactive activities. These engaging activities served mostly to inform and consult.	X	X	0	0	0	NE

**Exhibit 8****Inventory of 1RF Civic Engagement Strategies (2 of 3)**

Engagement Strategies		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Implement
<b>Scenario-planning activities</b>							
Scenario-mapping workshops	1RF planners brought scenario-mapping workshops to church basements, public housing authorities, bars, high schools, rural town halls, inner city community centers, and other venues. More than 770 citizens from across the region created 115 maps during the November 2013 Community Congress and the Workshops On The Road. The workshop enabled collaboration; participants engaged with other stakeholders with diverse perspectives, working to identify common ground and ways to address population stagnation, housing vacancies, brownfields, and other characteristics of economic decline. It is unclear if the workshop built capacity for shared action.	X	X	X	X	0	NE
Scenario-mapping open houses	Planners analyzed the 115 citizen-created maps to identify common trends, which they used to form three different alternative scenarios for the region's future. They presented the alternative scenarios at open houses, and used clicker technology and an online feedback tool to collect feedback from citizens.	X	X	X	0	0	NE
<b>Leadership academies and planning schools</b>							
Citizen Planning School	1RF created the CPS to "teach the plan" and offer implementation tools to citizen activists, nonprofit leaders, planning board members, and others. In 2014 and 2015, 1RF held two sets of listening sessions and workshops. Leaders from various sectors spoke in panels with interactive Q and A, followed by interactive, capacity-building workshops.	X	X	0	0	X	EE
Champions for Change	In 2014 and 2015, Champions for Change, a program of CPS, provided leadership development and project-based technical support for residents leading initiatives related to 1RF goals. Participants included leaders from low-income neighborhoods. The program includes an annual Idea Summit that exposes decisionmakers, funders, and the general public to the Champions' proposals for sustainable development. The program continued in 2017. To date, 42 community members have become "Champions for Change."	X	X	0	0	X	EE
<b>Crowdsourced inventories (for example, asset maps)</b>							
PhotoVoices	This online forum enabled residents to share photos or videos of places they want to change or places they want to keep for future generations. Outreach to summer youth camps brought youth into the planning process.	X	X	0	0	0	NE
Sustainability in Action	This digital repository of cases defining sustainability in the region was crowdsourced by individuals, businesses, organizations, and local officials. Contact information enables networking and collaboration.	X	X	0	X	0	TR

## Exhibit 8

### Inventory of 1RF Civic Engagement Strategies (3 of 3)

Engagement Strategies		Inform	Consult	Involve	Collaborate	Empower	Implement
General resources, tools, data, research							
Online tools	The program website features online tools, including Mapping Metrics, a Plan Library, Working Group Reports, Scenario Data and Trends, and others. Workshops were held in CPS to empower residents to use these powerful tools.	X	0	0	0	X	TR
Interactive games	These interactive quizzes and games sought to educate participants on key issues such as the connection between sprawl and housing vacancy, tax implications of expanding public infrastructure, climate change impacts, food access, and more.	X	0	0	0	0	TR
Social media							
Share-It-Forward Toolkit	This digital toolkit features flyers, images, web badges, and social media content for sharing with your networks.	X	0	0	X	0	TR
Social media presence	Social media presence on Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, Flickr, and YouTube enables the engagement of greater numbers of people, expanding the potential for collaboration among growing social networks.	X	0	0	X	0	TR
Citizen advisory committees, work groups							
Local Government Council	A Local Government Council consisting of the mayors, supervisors, council members, and legislators from the region's 64 municipalities met to check in on the plan's progress to ensure those with the ability to shape policies, programs, and projects were actively engaged in the planning.	X	X	X	X	0	NE
Working teams	More than 100 local planning and subject-matter experts participated in a working group process that identified regional and local strategies in housing equity and efficiency, food access and justice, land use and development, transportation and mobility, and climate change mitigation and adaptation.	X	X	X	X	0	NE
Private Sector Council	A Private Sector Council involving representatives from major employers and development groups, along with every local chamber of commerce, was convened at key points in the process to create a two-way conversation between the business community and the planners working on 1RF.	X	X	X	X	0	NE
Implementation compacts (plan endorsement, action pledges, and so on)							
Committed action	The MPO, both counties, the region's two major cities, regional chamber of commerce, large nonprofits, anchor institutions, and university centers commit to implementing the plan both collaboratively and within their individual organizational powers and authorities. Official commitments empower others to act in accordance with the plan and support collaboration.	0	0	0	X	X	EE
Implementation Council	The 1RF Implementation Council meets quarterly to coordinate efforts around providing support, information, and tools to advance the principles of 1RF. The council represents the partnership of government and nonprofit and academic organizations in our region with capacity and experience in transportation, housing, economic development, community health, public engagement, and regional planning.	X	X	X	X	0	EE

*1RF = One Region Forward. CPS = Citizen Planning School. EE = explicit evidence. MPO = metropolitan planning organization. NE = not explicit. TR = tools and resources (online).*

## Discussion of IRF's Civic Engagement Strategy

IRF's integrative approach to cross-sector civic engagement succeeded in engaging more than 5,000 people, representing a diverse range of interests, geographies (cities, towns, villages), and socioeconomic backgrounds. The design of the civic engagement process created a series of mutually supportive, reinforcing, and cumulative events that enabled meaningful involvement, collaboration, and empowerment. The engagement process was designed to ensure that stakeholders were engaged strategically, selectively, and with many points of entry to honor both the contribution of their time and insights. The following cursory summary of the process provides a glimpse at how a variety of engagement activities, with varied functions, were strategically integrated.

At the outset of the planning process, instead of using large group meetings to start a new conversation about regional values and vision, the engagement team recognized that conversations about the future of the region had been occurring for years, with countless hours of citizen participation having been invested in many different comprehensive plans throughout the region. As such, the IRF team first collected, read, and analyzed more than 160 plans to identify common values and visions (and the plans were posted in a Plan Library on the IRF website). The team then presented the results of their content analysis at two Community Congress meetings (one in Buffalo, one in Niagara Falls), in which more than 270 citizens and community group representatives provided their feedback. By using live-polling technology (Poll-Everywhere), participants were able to get a sense of the diversity of perspectives and areas of common ground in their responses.

The next phase of the process explored ways to advance the vision and values of the region via policy and land use recommendations. This phase included two general areas of knowledge and insight production: (1) policy recommendations particular to five key regional priorities—land use and development, transportation and mobility, housing and neighborhoods, food access and justice, and climate change action; and (2) integrated land use recommendations and scenarios. The first process leveraged the knowledge and expertise of regional experts and leaders through five working groups. Citizens were enabled to provide feedback on these areas through a Text It Forward Campaign with surveys focused on the working groups' research areas; additional questions were posed monthly during the spring and summer of 2014. The second process enabled citizens to give spatial expression to their regional priorities for land use through scenario mapping workshops.

In the fall and winter of 2013, 27 scenario mapping workshops (held both in large public events, and through smaller, distributed gatherings across the region) were employed that not only informed, consulted, and involved participants in two-way deliberation, but also created opportunities for collaboration and empowerment. In these hands-on workshops, small groups of participants were given base maps and game pieces representing different land use options. They were then challenged to work together to create a map of the future that would advance the common values and visions of the region, considering what they would like to invest in; protect and change; and where they would like to locate homes, jobs, and attractions. Using the game pieces, they worked within certain parameters to create a regional land use scenario they could all get behind. Not only did it create an opportunity for participants to integrate newer knowledge about regional trends (both from presentations and published reports of working groups) with their own local knowledge and apply it to the challenge, they also got to engage meaningfully with other citizens to work out solutions. One focus group participant said that, not only was the workshop effective in supporting

hands-on learning, he greatly enjoyed the opportunity to interact with other people with different backgrounds and perspectives about desired urban form. Thus, beyond collecting input, these workshops cultivated social capital and the capacity for collective problem solving in the region.

In the process, 770 citizens created 115 maps, which were then analyzed and synthesized into three different future land use scenario possibilities and one “business as usual” scenario. Using the Envision Tomorrow software package, the team demonstrated the predicted impacts of each of these land use scenarios. The results were then presented for collective feedback at two large Alternative Scenario open houses held in both Erie and Niagara Counties. Feedback was also collected via the Alternative Scenario Online Feedback Tool, enabling community members who could not attend meetings to participate; results were provided online for real-time feedback.

Buffalo-Niagara demonstrates that a comprehensive process can be designed using a wide range of valuable tools, each with their own functional value. Together, they served to inform, consult, involve, collaborate with, and empower a diverse range of stakeholders to shape a more sustainable future for the region. The engagement process cultivated both human and social capital that could be leveraged for plan implementation. Once the plan was completed, the engagement process continued, especially with the CPS and Champions for Change programs.

### **The Citizen Planning School**

CPS was designed to cultivate the capacity and collective will of the region’s diverse residents to advance the vision, values, goals, and strategies of the sustainable regional plan. In 2014 and 2015, two sets of listening sessions and workshops were held in which leaders from various sectors spoke in panels with interactive Q and A, followed by interactive, capacity-building workshops designed to “teach the plan” and support its implementation. To date, the listening sessions and workshops have engaged over 300 citizens, and it is intended to continue going forward. In both years of the program, CPS also included Champions for Change, an intensive leadership development and project-based technical support program for residents leading initiatives related to IRF goals. Focus groups and interviews with participants held in the spring and summer of 2016 revealed that these capacity-building programs have cultivated human and social capital in four main ways.

Firstly, the participants reported that they appreciated learning new content knowledge about regional trends, challenges, and emerging solutions. Many found the panel presentations and discussions to be highly informative, both from the contributions of the presenters themselves and by the highly engaged, experienced audience. Two participants noted that the interactive quizzes used during the listening sessions were helpful, in that they reinforced what they had just learned. Several more reported that they found it very helpful that YouTube videos of presentations and working group reports were available online. Not only did these resources reinforce their learning, they were also available to share with others in their networks and with public officials. Furthermore, although the website resources were classified only for their function of “inform,” at least two focus group participants suggested that the Mapping Metrics tools were empowering for them; access to these powerful tools enabled them to be more effective in their advocacy efforts.

Secondly, participants in the Champions for Change program reported that the hands-on workshops and coaching from students, faculty, and peers in the program empowered their efforts in

making changes. Several found that they increased their capacity for program design and project management through the program, including developing proficiency with logic models. By talking their project ideas through with others and translating them into a clear structure, they were able to make meaningful progress. Additionally, the program created an energizing social context with social accountability that motivated personal action and followthrough.

Thirdly, participants in Champions for Change found that their own effectiveness was expanded through access to skills and resources in a broader network. Most directly, participants benefited from the technical assistance provided by students and faculty of CPS, especially with regard to graphic design, social media, research, and GIS, or geographic information system, support. Some were able to access funding from other outside sources through contacts made in the IRF network.

Finally, participants also suggested that CPS was empowering, in that it created a sense of collective will for a shared vision of the future. The story of the past and future presented by the IRF Plan resonated with many of them. Many participants drew inspiration from being part of a visible network of leaders working to improve the wellbeing of the region. Several participants appreciated the geographic and socioeconomic diversity of other participants (panelists and general citizens), as well as the range of perspectives at the table. One participant said that she enjoyed the Poll-Everywhere surveys because it helped her to get a clearer idea of where commonalities existed.

### **Role of University as Anchor Institution**

As the discussion of perspectives previously suggests, for the most part, participants in the CPS found that the program was valuable for the community and personally benefited them. Although most wanted to see the program continue, many expressed their skepticism that the program would be carried into the future and wondered what would actually happen with the implementation of the plan. A recurring theme among participants was the idea that the University at Buffalo (UB) is a major driver of the regional economy and had contributed significantly to the recent surge in downtown reinvestment, especially with the new Buffalo Niagara Medical Campus. With this acknowledgment, many participants named a significant concern about emerging patterns of gentrification. As one Champion for Change noted, “there are a lot of buildings being built, but they aren’t building people.” Her immediate project for Champions for Change was to develop a business model for a whole human-centered economic empowerment program, but her larger motivation for participating was to keep apprised to the developments happening in the city and to hold leaders accountable to just, equitable development. Several other participants shared her concern that new jobs were not going to the people who had lived there. They believed that the CPS was one of the ways the university had been positively contributing to this challenge and urged that UB fulfill its responsibilities as an anchor institution in the area. The general CPS programming helped participants understand current trends and key players—essential to active citizen engagement. Most participants were impressed by the diversity of those in attendance at events, and one participant underscored that the convening power of UB was a key strength of CPS and IRF in building civic networks and social capital. The Champions for Change program helped build individual capacity that could be translated in many areas. However, many of the participants were concerned about the lack of updates they had about the plan, and many equated the IRF network with the university, in general, and the School of Architecture and Planning, in particular.

## **Implementation Phase: Successes and Challenges**

Although focus groups revealed uncertainty among citizen planners about the progression of the plan's implementation and opportunities for their ongoing involvement, the perception that UB in general and its School of Architecture and Planning and UB Regional Institute (UBRI) would be key players in regional development was consistent. UBRI expanded its capacity for innovation in civic engagement and infrastructure in the course of the SCI planning process, but engagement activities require staff support and other funding. UBRI has succeeded in including funding for such engagement activities in grants from other projects, such as the Cleaner, Greener Communities Program with the New York State Energy, Research, and Development Authority and the Niagara Street Now streetscape redesign initiative. However, without sustained funding, it will be difficult to support ongoing civic infrastructure programming, like the CPS and its Champions for Change program, or even to keep track of and promote ongoing civic engagement opportunities related to advancing the regional plan that have been advanced by partners.

Concerns about the sustainability of regional civic infrastructure notwithstanding, it appears that 1RF laid a strong foundation for collaborative action toward a common vision, goals, and strategies. Having cultivated such a diverse range of informed, connected, and capable stakeholders, the civic engagement process established a foundation for collaborative action to forward the plan's vision of a sustainable region. In practical terms, this includes commitments from the region's MPO—Greater Buffalo Niagara Regional Transportation Council—both counties, the region's two major cities, the regional chamber of commerce, large nonprofits, anchor institutions, and university centers to implement the plan both collaboratively and within their individual organizational powers and authorities. As an example of this integration, the regional chamber of commerce now employs 1RF's performance measures in its selection of priority projects to promote in its state and federal advocacy work. Collective capacity, coupled with the SCI Preferred Sustainability Status designation, supported the submission of at least 15 collaborative grant applications in 2015 to implement elements of the plan (including a successful U.S. Department of Transportation grant to study opportunities for transit-oriented development).

## **Conclusions of Case Study**

The 1RF case study reveals the capacity of regions to develop a comprehensive, multifunctional, multiyear, civic engagement process that meaningfully engages geographically, socioeconomically, and culturally diverse members of the regional community. Not only did 1RF's civic engagement process lead to a more informed, broadly supported regional plan, it also built human and social capital that will support the collective action required to realize the plan's vision.

A key strength of the 1RF process was the way it leveraged existing civic infrastructure. From the outset, 1RF leveraged existing municipal plans in the region, recognizing that tremendous human, social, and political capital had already been invested in these plans through existing civic infrastructure. Moreover, 1RF leveraged the strengths of UB as an anchor institution—particularly, the convening power and capacity-building strengths of the UB School of Architecture and Planning and UBRI. The case study also revealed the vulnerability of new civic infrastructure programs to a lack of ongoing funding.

## Overarching Discussion and Conclusions

In review, this two-part study reveals the significance of the SCI's approach to investments in civic engagement from historical and practical perspectives.

From a historical perspective, SCI works to overcome the social inequality, segregation, and erosion of civic infrastructure that urban renewal-era regional planning causes. Although contemporary planning often debates the merits of top-down versus bottom-up planning, SCI integrates these processes and emphasizes the kind of holistic, comprehensive approach to regional planning. True to the foundations of regional planning, SCI leveraged existing civic infrastructure to more efficiently design context-appropriate, equitable infrastructure solutions, as reflected by the transportation corridor projects in Minneapolis, Denver, and Seattle. SCI grantees also leveraged the convening power and capacity-building strengths of local universities and other anchor institutions. Furthermore, SCI worked to advance regional equity by providing funding and technical support for grantees to engage marginalized communities in comprehensive civic engagement processes to support equitable, sustainable communities of opportunity.

From a practical perspective, the review of SCI regional grantees' civic engagement activities shows that SCI investments led to the implementation of innovative, holistic, multifunctional, and multi-year civic engagement processes that leveraged and strengthened existing civic infrastructure. The study revealed that even informing, consulting, and involving have their place in a comprehensively designed engagement process. Regional grantees employed innovative practices that expanded the equity and effectiveness of these three vital functions. For instance, meetings in a box, placemats with surveys, and interactive web-based activities enabled geographically, culturally, and socioeconomically diverse stakeholders to participate (and even network in some cases) without having to travel to a public meeting. Large public meetings were transformed through Poll-Everywhere technology and breakout interactive activities to enable more meaningful involvement, dialogue, and deliberation. Moreover, innovative activities were used to collaborate and empower—building the human, social, political, and cultural capital required to advance equitable, sustainable regions of opportunity. Speaker series, interactive workshops, working groups, leadership academies, and capacity-building grants all cultivated the capacity, connections, and collective will needed to lead change.

The study also revealed important challenges with regard to sustaining civic infrastructure, as well as designing and assessing the quality and effectiveness of civic engagement activities.

### Challenges of Sustaining Civic Infrastructure

Sustained civic engagement is vital for regional plan implementation, yet most of the civic engagement activities we studied only occurred in the planning phase. When civic engagement activities did persist into the implementation phase, they were typically in areas where federal investments leveraged the strength of existing civic infrastructure, including community-based organizations, anchor institutions, philanthropic foundations, and MPOs. In metropolitan regions where strong community-based organizations already exist (for example, Boston, Baltimore, Denver, Minneapolis, and Seattle), SCI funds could be used to leverage these community assets to advance inclusive, responsive community engagement processes. SCI investments in Together North Jersey and IRF developed civic engagement processes that continued into the implementation phase by leveraging

local universities with a history of regional leadership. Even with these existing regional strengths, the results show that it is difficult to sustain regional equity networks, citizen planning academies, and other capacity-building civic infrastructure beyond the planning phase.

These findings present some dilemmas for future federal involvement in regional planning. Given the challenge that grantees had in sustaining civic engagement activities beyond the planning phase, should future federal investments provide ongoing support for engagement in the implementation phase? Because the regions that were most successful in sustaining engagement in the implementation phase were those that already had strong civic infrastructure, should federal funds be focused in regions with existing community capacity? On the contrary, should federal investments be used to build civic infrastructure in areas where it is weak to build a stronger foundation for future regional planning? The first two rounds of funding prioritized regions with strong, existing civic infrastructure—only regions that could demonstrate commitment and capacity for broad collaboration were considered. This strategy generated positive outcomes. Leveraging existing regional capacity expanded the impacts of federal funds, not only for the regions themselves, but also by developing a broader set of innovative civic engagement tools that can be shared more generally. Ideally, ongoing capacity building should be available, and funds should be used to build capacity for equitable development in all regions. However, given the interest in showcasing the feasibility of equitable, sustainable development where funds are limited, SCI's design strategy of bolstering communities with demonstrated commitments to equity and pre-existing civic infrastructure appears to be an efficient and effective strategy.

## **Challenges in Assessing the Quality of Civic Engagement Activities**

The study also revealed challenges and opportunities in the development of frameworks to support the design, reporting, and evaluation of effective civic engagement processes in regional planning.

First, it is important to note that this study was limited to information that was voluntarily posted on public websites by regional grantees or required by HUD in reporting. Grantees were not required to systematically submit comprehensive civic engagement plans or reports on the effectiveness in implementation of those plans. This is somewhat surprising given that: (1) the 2011 notice of funding availability from HUD required that 10 percent of the budget be invested in engaging marginalized communities in participatory processes, and (2) grantees were provided with checklists and guidelines for equitable and effective civic engagement process design, including the IAP2 spectrum of public participation. Despite this foundation, reporting was highly inconsistent, especially around processes that advanced equity.

It is possible that attempts to address social and racial equity occurred but were not well publicized on websites. In the future, we recommend that all SCI grantees submit a comprehensive plan for civic engagement with specific, measurable, achievable, and relevant objectives informed by a standard design or evaluation framework for effective and equitable civic engagement in regional planning. In final reporting, grantees should submit a review of their effectiveness in achieving these objectives.

In considering the structure of a standard design or evaluation framework, we recommend building on the methodological approach in this study. Evaluating regional civic engagement activities based on the multiple functions they serve was helpful in understanding nuanced approaches and innovation among grantees. For example, reviewing the inventory of IRF strategies presented in

exhibit 8 makes it clear that the region took a comprehensive approach that served many important functions. If such a table were completed at the outset of a planning process, planners could easily see which functions were well served and where gaps could be filled. The focus on developing a functional inventory, rather than an assessment based on a scale of power distribution between the state and the citizens, is a clear methodological advantage for evaluation of civic engagement in a regional planning context with multiple decisionmaking agencies and diverse communities.

Although the functional codes used in this study are a step in the right direction, areas for improvement still exist. The codes for “inform, consult, and involve” were generally reliable and effective. The codes pertaining to capacity building for collective action for equitable and sustainable regions (collaborate and empower) posed methodological challenges. In the future, we recommend that planners and researchers consider the community capitals framework employed by Mandarano (2015) in her study of citizen planning academies to evaluate the potential of activities to build community capacity in the form of human, social, political, and cultural capital (direct potential outcomes of activities), if not also built and natural capital (indirect potential outcomes in some activities, and direct outcomes of some capacity-building implementation grants). Engagement plans should also be evaluated on the extent to which they strengthen civic infrastructure and advance equity. With regard to equity, activities should be evaluated on how they: (1) engage and empower marginalized communities in the process, and (2) build the capacity of diverse stakeholders to understand and address substantive and structural barriers to equity of opportunity in the region.

In closing, this study finds that the SCI’s approach to civic engagement and equity in regional planning represents a historically significant development in the evolution of regional planning theory and practice. It demonstrates that the federal government can play a vital role in integrating expert and local knowledge, top-down and bottom-up planning processes, and investments in civic infrastructure, coupled with infrastructure for transportation, housing, and environmental protection. In the future, planning for comprehensive, equitable, and regional civic engagement will be strengthened by the innovative practices demonstrated through these grantees, as well as enhanced frameworks for design and evaluation of civic engagement processes that inform, consult, and involve diverse stakeholders in ways that build their capacity to collaboratively build equitable and sustainable regions of opportunity.

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