



STRATEGIC VISION AND PLAN

2022 - 2027

WESTERN CONNECTICUT COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (WESTCOG)



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This strategic plan was made possible through the generous contributions of many individuals, organizations, and partners that devoted their time, energy, and ideas to aid in its creation. The strategic planning process included a comprehensive stakeholder outreach effort that engaged nearly 50 individuals from nearly 30 planning, economic development, municipal, transportation, and/or community development organizations. Stakeholders were invited to participate in various interviews, workshops, surveys, and in the case of WestCOG's Council an executive retreat.

WESTCOG EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE AND COUNCIL MEMBERS

- Rudolph Marconi First Selectman, Town of Ridgefield – Executive Committee Member and Council Chairman
- Jayme Stevenson, First Selectman, Town of Darien – Executive Committee Member and Council Vice-Chairman
- Julia Pemberton, First Selectman, Town of Redding – Executive Committee Member and Council Treasurer
- Lynne Vanderslice, First Selectman, Town of Wilton – Executive Committee Member and Council Secretary
- Matt Knickerbocker, First Selectman, Town of Bethel
- Curtis Read, First Selectman, Town of Bridgewater
- Stephen Dunn, First Selectman, Town of Brookfield
- Joseph Cavo, Mayor, City of Danbury
- Fred Camillo, First Selectman, Town of Greenwich
- Kevin Moynihan, First Selectman, Town of New Canaan
- Pat Del Monaco, First Selectwoman, Town of New Fairfield
- Peter Bass, Mayor, Town of New Milford
- Daniel Rosenthal, First Selectman, Town of Newtown
- Harry Rilling, Mayor, City of Norwalk
- Don Lowe, First Selectman, Town of Sherman
- David Martin, Mayor, City of Stamford
- Christopher Spaulding, First Selectman, Town of Weston
- Jim Marpe, First Selectman, Town of Westport

WESTCOG STAFF MEMBERS

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- Victoria Ricks, Financial Manager (2021)



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- Tucker Beckett, GIS Analyst

LOCAL, REGIONAL, AND STATE ORGANIZATIONS

- Members of WestCOG's Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
- The Connecticut Office of Policy and Management
- The Connecticut Office of Economic Development
- The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities (CCM)
- The Connecticut Council of Small Towns (COST)
- Advance CT
- The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (Mass)
- The Greater Portland Council of Governments (ME)
- The Capital District Regional Planning Agency (NY)
- Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (VA)

CAMOIN ASSOCIATES PROJECT TEAM

- Dan Gundersen – Senior Vice President & Project Principal
- Andy Marzo – Senior Project Manager

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SUMMARY BACKGROUND



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This is a five-year strategic vision and plan that serves as a road map for the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG). It outlines an expansive vision and mission for WestCOG along with actionable strategies for achieving the organization's top-line goals for advancing economic opportunities and a higher quality of life for residents of Western Connecticut.

This plan was developed for WestCOG and its council as both a strategy to guide the direction of WestCOG as an organization, and as a management tool for staff and Council members to use when making decisions and tracking the results of important programs, policies, and initiatives to realize the organization's overarching vision.

To achieve its new vision, the Council determined that the organization must fill critical voids by assuming three new or expanded roles in Western Connecticut. The Council determined that WestCOG must serve as:

- a) A champion for **collaborative partnerships**,
- b) Do more to help advance **economic opportunities** for residents, and,
- c) Put an increased focus on advancing and advocating for projects that will have a **transformative impact** on the region.

In laying out these roles, the Council realized that WestCOG would need to support and integrate its many successful current initiatives into the new strategy framework and, at the same time, provide expanded services to members, magnify the advocacy of Western Connecticut interests statewide and nationally, and do a better job of telling Western Connecticut's "story" regarding WestCOG successes and those of its member communities.

The 2022-2027 WestCOG Strategic Vision and Plan pulls these interests together by drawing a Strategy Map and corresponding Balanced Scorecard that provides specific action steps and metrics to bring about proper management control and accountability. All actions are synchronized to "flow up" so that when action steps at one level of the Strategy Map are taken, they consequently produce outputs and outcomes that then feed into realizing top-level goals for the organization and region.

In this way, the WestCOG 2022-2027 Strategy is not just a written plan. It is also a dynamic management tool for 'getting the job done.'

BACKGROUND – BUILDING ON THE PAST WHILE LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE

The State of Connecticut passed legislation in the 1980s establishing fifteen regional councils, which clustered towns with similar demographics into an administrative planning region instead of adhering to the old county structure. In 2014 the state Office of Policy and Management (OPM) completed a comprehensive analysis of the boundaries of logical planning regions in Connecticut under Section 16a-4c of the Connecticut General Statutes (2014 Supplement). This analysis resulted in the number of planning regions being reduced from the original fifteen to nine.

Founded in 2014 through the merger of the Housatonic Valley Council of Elected Officials and Southwestern Regional Planning Agency (SWRPA), the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) is one of nine regional councils and planning regions in the State of Connecticut. Connecticut's planning regions provide a geographic framework within which municipalities can jointly address common interests, and coordinate

such interests with state plans and programs. WestCOG provides a forum for municipalities to communicate and collaborate in addressing inter-municipal issues and needs.

The WestCOG region is the second most populous and fastest-growing region in Connecticut, with an estimated population of 600,000+ residents. With its location connecting New England to New York, Western Connecticut is an economically dynamic region, with strong cultural, educational, and natural amenities. WestCOG represents some of the most desirable communities in the United States and the region is a major financial contributor to the economy of the New York metro area and the State of Connecticut.

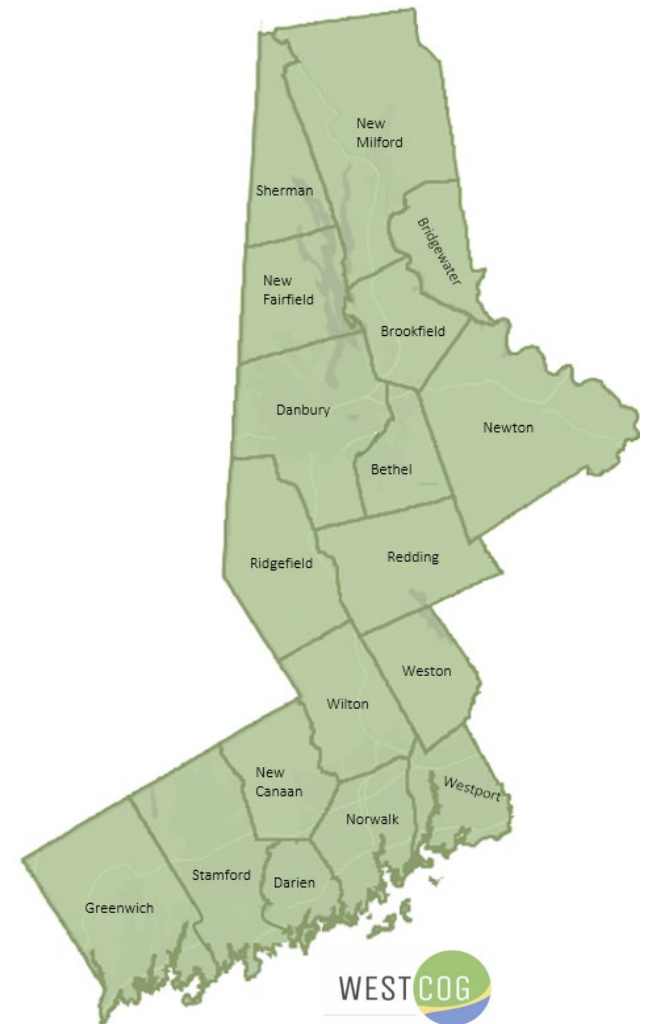
WestCOG's members include three principal cities (Stamford, Norwalk, and Danbury) and 15 surrounding towns (Bridgewater, Brookfield, Danbury, Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, New Fairfield, New Milford, Newtown, Redding, Ridgefield, Sherman, Weston, Westport, and Wilton).

As of Q2 2021, WestCOG has ten (10) full-time and three (3) part-time employees. The organization includes three primary divisions, including Administration and Finance, Transportation, and Analytics. WestCOG is primarily funded through state and federal grant revenues, with the organization's overall annual revenues ranging from \$1.7M to \$2.2M from 2018 to 2020.

State policy since the inception of COGs has enabled WestCOG and the organization's peers to diversify beyond their well-established roles in regional land use and transportation planning (specifically as the host agencies for the state's Metropolitan Planning Organizations). Today, WestCOG and other Connecticut COGs also focus on the regional delivery of services currently or expected to be provided by local governments, either through direct regional services or through facilitating interlocal shared services.

To date, WestCOG has focused largely on establishing itself as a newly formed organization. Primary areas of effort and focus have included staff recruitment, development, and retention initiatives; understanding and continuing to refine the organization's services; and working to develop relationships and gain a reputation as a regional hub for collaboration and innovation for communities in western Connecticut. WestCOG, like many of its peer organizations, has adhered to various state policies and mandates that, in recent years, diversified beyond its well-established role in regional land use and transportation planning.

Today, WestCOG focuses on a wide range of planning initiatives and the regional delivery of services that are expected to be provided by local governments, either through direct regional services or through facilitating interlocal shared services. Specifically, WestCOG works on topical areas focused on transportation, land-use, community development, environment, and open space while providing technical and planning assistance and



expertise to its members. While the organization is often tasked with performing and leading ad-hoc regional initiatives throughout the year, WestCOG's current services can be organized under six major focus areas, including:

- Regional Planning and Coordination
- Transportation Planning
- Environmental Planning
- Economic Development Planning
- Emergency Management
- Data Analytics

The efforts and initiatives undertaken by the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) and its governing Council are ultimately aimed at benefiting and improving the lives of the many individuals, businesses, organizations, and stakeholders in the western Connecticut region.

The top-level results of the planning efforts that produced the 2022-2027 Strategic Plan are presented in this report. They include vision, mission, values, strategic results, priorities, and actions (see diagram on next page.)





WestCOG
2022-2027
Strategic
Plan

Vision

Our communities work harmoniously to ensure all residents enjoy the highest levels of satisfaction for quality of life and economic prosperity in the Northeast.

Mission

We work collaboratively with government and civic leaders to provide exceptional public services for Western Connecticut

Values

Collaboration, Communication, Credibility, Inclusivity, Innovation, Trust

Strategic Results

Economic Vitality & Higher Quality of Life

Strategic Priorities

Transformative Regional Projects - Community Advocacy - Fiscal Stability - Regional Collaboration - Equitable Development

Strategic Actions

Champion Collaborative Partnerships - Advance Economic Opportunity - Advance Transformative Regional Projects - Expand & Leverage Member Services - Magnify Western CT Advocacy - Tell the Story - Expand Intelligence - Optimize Internal Operations - Informed and Engaged Decision Making - Incorporate Diverse Perspectives - Leverage Existing Resources - Secure New Resources

APPROACH & METHODOLOGY



WHAT IS A STRATEGIC VISIONING AND PLANNING STRATEGY?

This strategic plan is a vision for WestCOG as an organization and reflects the voices of WestCOG's staff, council, and various other organizations and partners who provided their insights as part of this study. This document outlines not only WestCOG's mission and vision for the future as an organization but also actionable strategies for achieving the organization's goals as it looks toward the future.

This plan is a guide that WestCOG can regularly look to, reflect on, and measure itself against in the future as it looks to accomplish key recommendations and strategies for growth. WestCOG staff and council members can use this plan as a guide for important policies and decisions, as well as to monitor progress in achieving the organization's overarching vision and mission. In summary, this plan and its supplements should specifically be used to:

- Provide a framework and common goals for future organizational planning efforts and projects
- Guide policy decisions
- Inform organizational decisions
- Inform future resourcing and budgeting decisions
- Evaluate and measure process towards achieving organizational goals

STRATEGIC VISIONING AND PLANNING PROCESS

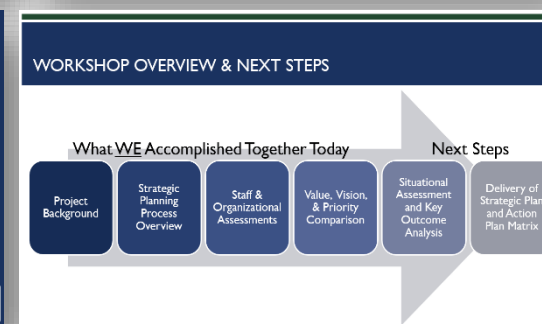
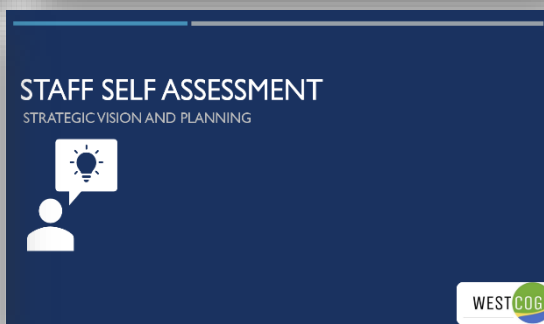
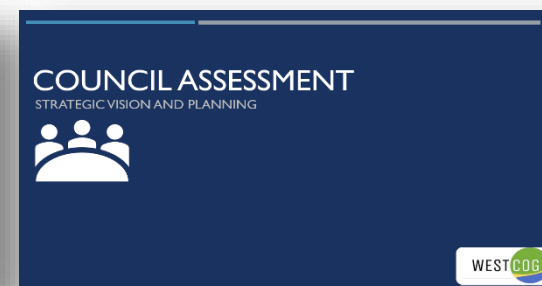
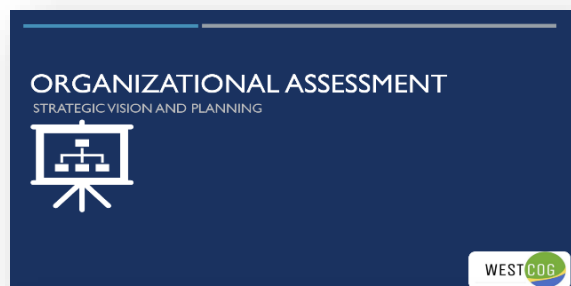


FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS AND BUILDING CONSENSUS

STAFF AND COUNCIL WORKSHOPS

In the spring of 2021, WestCOG staff and Council members were invited to participate in online surveys and collaborative workshops. Core questions that these exercises aimed to answer included:

- What core values should the organization focus on and represent?
- What do we want WestCOG to be known for as an organization in the future?
- What do we want the western Connecticut region to be known for in the future?
- What services, programs, and/or areas of focus should the organization prioritize moving forward?
- What should the mission and vision for the organization be, and what must happen to get others excited about them?
- What must change, both internally and externally to achieve success?
- What are the biggest challenges and opportunities facing the organization?
- What objectives and metrics should be the organization use to measure success?



COUNCIL EXECUTIVE RETREAT

In July of 2021, various Council members participated in an Executive Retreat to review key outcomes from the strategic planning process. The critical questions noted above were reflected upon, and answers were further refined with the intent of optimizing outcomes and ways for the organization to reach its goals and achieve its vision and mission. A balanced scorecard approach was followed where attendees were presented with, and 'reverse engineered' opportunities and challenges to finalize core objectives to achieve each of the identified goals as a part of the strategy map.

The four elements of the balanced scorecard and strategy map are outlined as follows:

REGIONAL INNOVATION & COLLABORATION: What initiatives must be executed to achieve further regional collaboration and partnerships that lead to improved fiscal and economic wellbeing for communities, and a higher quality of life in western Connecticut?

INTERNAL PROCESSES: What objectives and initiatives need to be undertaken to allow the organization to better serve its members while also accomplishing its goals?

ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY: What specifically is needed from the organization to initiate change?

FINANCIAL RESOURCES: What existing and additional resources need to be leveraged to fund initiatives outlined in the strategic plan?



STRATEGIC PLAN



VISION AND MISSION

Since the organization's inception in 2014, the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) has focused largely on establishing itself as an organization; staff recruitment, development, and retention initiatives; understanding and continuing to refine the organization's services; and working to develop relationships and gain a reputation as a regional hub for collaboration and innovation for communities in western Connecticut.

In 2020, WestCOG and its Council recognized the need to chart a bold, motivating, and implementable course for the organization's future through the development of a comprehensive organizational strategic vision and action plan. Acting as a roadmap for the organization's future, this strategic plan is the result of several different key strategic planning initiatives including a comprehensive internal and external stakeholder engagement process, analysis of the organization's internal operations, an external service delivery evaluation, and organizational benchmarking analysis, staff and council workshops, and an executive retreat where a balanced scorecard methodology was used to develop and refine key objectives for the organization.

As a result of these and other analyses and initiatives that were part of the strategic planning and visioning process, WestCOG, in partnership with Camoin Associates, developed a strategic vision and plan with clear goals and actionable strategies that will help chart the organization's path moving forward. Additionally, this strategy is guided by a new organizational mission and vision that were both developed as part of this initiative.

VISION

Our communities work harmoniously to ensure all residents enjoy the highest levels of satisfaction for quality of life and economic prosperity in the Northeast.

MISSION

We work collaboratively with government and civic leaders to provide exceptional public services for Western Connecticut.

STRATEGIC RESULTS

The efforts and initiatives undertaken by the Western Connecticut Council of Governments (WestCOG) and its Council are ultimately aimed at benefiting and improving the lives of the many individuals, businesses, organizations, and stakeholders in the western Connecticut region. To achieve this goal staff and Council members highlighted several current and future initiatives that would continue and enhance the organization's ability to achieve its mission and vision.

After collecting and analyzing various feedback from staff and Council members, in addition to feedback received during stakeholder outreach initiatives, the following were targeted as primary areas of strategic focus for WestCOG:

ECONOMIC VITALITY

An economically vital region can be described as having a combination of some of the following characteristics: it is comfortable and safe; has good quality and affordable housing; diverse arts and cultural amenities; quality infrastructure that anchors local and regional economies; diverse transportation options and infrastructure; quality educational opportunities and institutions; "good" jobs with benefits; is experiencing growth in population, jobs, and wages; has strong civic organizations; and is diverse and flexible enough to withstand economic challenges and change.

HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

High quality of life can be generally described as an environment that provides all individuals access to opportunities to live healthy, comfortable, and satisfying lives, and to participate as responsible members of the larger community.



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

To achieve economic vitality and high quality of life in Western Connecticut, in addition to further aligning the organization with its mission and vision, the WestCOG Council identified six strategic priorities as follows:

ECONOMIC VITALITY

- **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COORDINATION:** Manage the EDA-approved Economic Development District and its Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy while providing a forum for municipalities to consider and discuss collaborative ways to further economic growth in the region.
- **REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS:** Enhance existing collaboration between the organization's member communities, while continuing to foster, curate, and expand regional and statewide partnerships to help achieve the organization's goals and improve conditions for communities throughout the western Connecticut region.
- **TRANSFORMATIVE REGIONAL PROJECTS:** Enhanced focus on developing and implementing tangible projects that produce substantive benefit and extraordinary value to communities across Western Connecticut.

HIGH QUALITY OF LIFE

- **COMMUNITY ADVOCACY:** Enhanced advocacy at the local, regional, state, and federal levels to communicate high-priority projects and issues with external stakeholders and decision-makers, while also identifying and pursuing additional resources for communities in western Connecticut.
- **EQUITABLE GROWTH:** Emphasize and establish initiatives that will act to further catalyze inclusive and equitable development throughout the western Connecticut region.
- **FISCAL STABILITY:** Improve the fiscal stability and capacity of the organization, in addition to communities throughout the western Connecticut region.

Western Connecticut Council of Governments

The Next Phase: 2022—2027

Vision	Our communities work harmoniously to ensure all residents enjoy the highest levels of satisfaction for quality of life and economic prosperity in the Northeast.					
Mission	We work collaboratively with government and civic leaders to ensure exceptional delivery of public services for Western Connecticut.					
Values	Collaboration	Communication	Credibility	Inclusivity	Innovation	Trust
Strategic Priorities	Economic Development Coordination	Regional Partnerships	Transformative Regional Projects	Community Advocacy	Equitable Growth	Fiscal Stability
Strategic Results	Economic Vitality			High Quality of Life		

STRATEGY MAP

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

The WestCOG Executive Council, having developed its areas of strategic focus and priorities, mapped out the action steps necessary to realize positive changes for the region. In this way, the Council established the foundation for a fully integrated **Strategy Map** to form the basis for its work plan moving forward.

The strategy map (see page 17) lays out four levels. At the highest level are three strategic action outcomes for WestCOG. These were viewed as critical roles and activities, in addition to current program activities, that must be pursued to further the vision, mission, and desired strategic results for Western Connecticut. They are for the organization to fill a void and:

- Champion **collaborative partnerships** amongst WestCOG's member communities and staff,
- Advance **economic opportunities** for WestCOG communities, and,
- Advance **transformative regional projects** in western Connecticut.

The Strategy Map next identifies critical roles within the organization that need to be embraced and developed by WestCOG staff and Council members. These implementation roles include adding new program elements to expand services to its member municipalities; magnifying an advocacy role for projects, priorities, programs, and priorities important to Western Connecticut, and, telling the Western Connecticut and WestCOG story, that is, how the organizations' efforts help improve life in Western Connecticut.

The next level of the strategy map recognizes that change does not happen magically or overnight. It must be managed internally with a focus on new ways of conducting business and thinking. In all, four specific internal, process-oriented changes are needed to realize the overarching strategic goals. These implementation tactics include:

- Expanding the intelligence-gathering abilities of the organization to ensure that it has the most timely, accurate, and relevant information on which to base decisions,
- Optimizing operations for WestCOG as an organization. The operations plan must incorporate annual review of the strategy map and use of the balanced scorecard to monitor progress,
- Introducing more information for better decision making and engagement by staff and Council,
- Incorporating diverse perspectives through various outreach activities. New perspectives that encourage consideration and diligent response to diverse interests need to be introduced into the "DNA" of WestCOG

And finally, a linkage is made for which changes will require leveraging existing resources versus those where new funds will be needed.

READING THE STRATEGY MAP

The elements of the strategy map are outlined in more detail in the following sections along with specific implementation strategies to achieve them.

The Strategy Map can be read from the bottom to top or vice versa. The bottom elements of the map are more task and output-oriented while the top elements provide roles that lead to outcomes. Each action is linked to another. Successful implementation of one action produces results which contribute, or “feed into” a desired outcome. This provides a holistic perspective on how the different parts of the organization work together to achieve the strategic results and ultimately the mission and vision for the organization moving forward.

For example, the image to the right focuses only on expanding and leveraging member services. This is one implementation strategy/objective that is necessary if WestCOG is to increase economic opportunity and effectively assume a role in advancing transformative regional projects in western Connecticut.

To implement and ultimately achieve the organization’s objective of expanding and leveraging member services, WestCOG will need to put an increased internal focus on expanding intelligence that will lead to more informed decision making, optimize operational strategies for WestCOG as an organization, and enhance contracting capabilities.

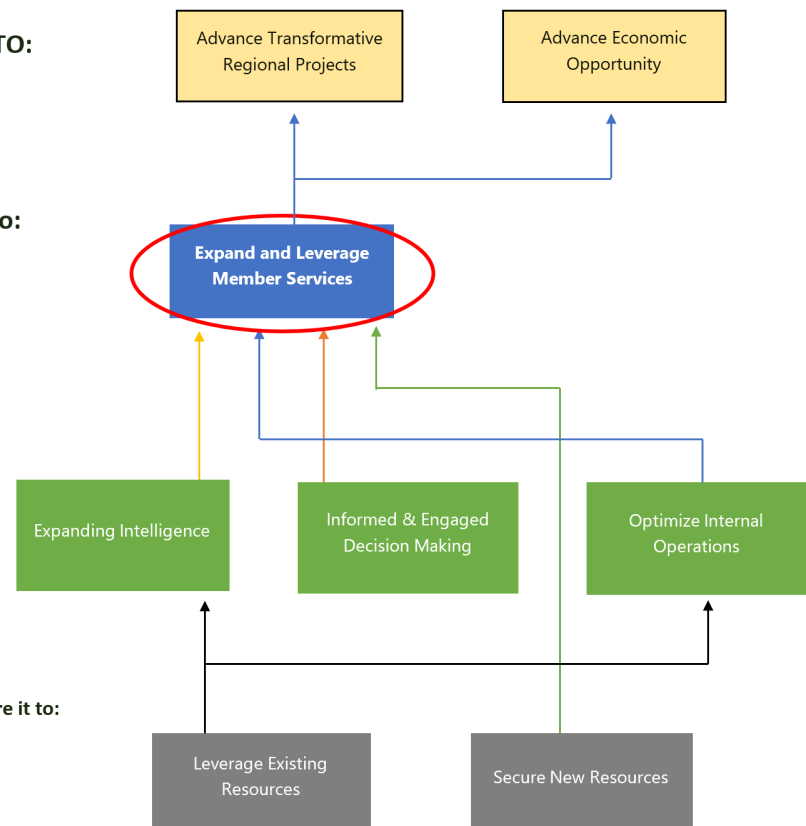
Finally, in order to expand member services while also implementing these new ways of conducting business (Expanding intel, optimizing internal operations, and ensuring more informed and engaged decision making capabilities) WestCOG will be required to both secure new financial resources and leverage its existing resources to ultimately achieve success. In these ways, the strategy map provides a visual portrayal of how different elements relate to and are dependent on one another to achieve the strategic results and priorities for the organization, and ultimately enable it to realize its overarching mission and vision as an organization.

FOR WCOG TO:

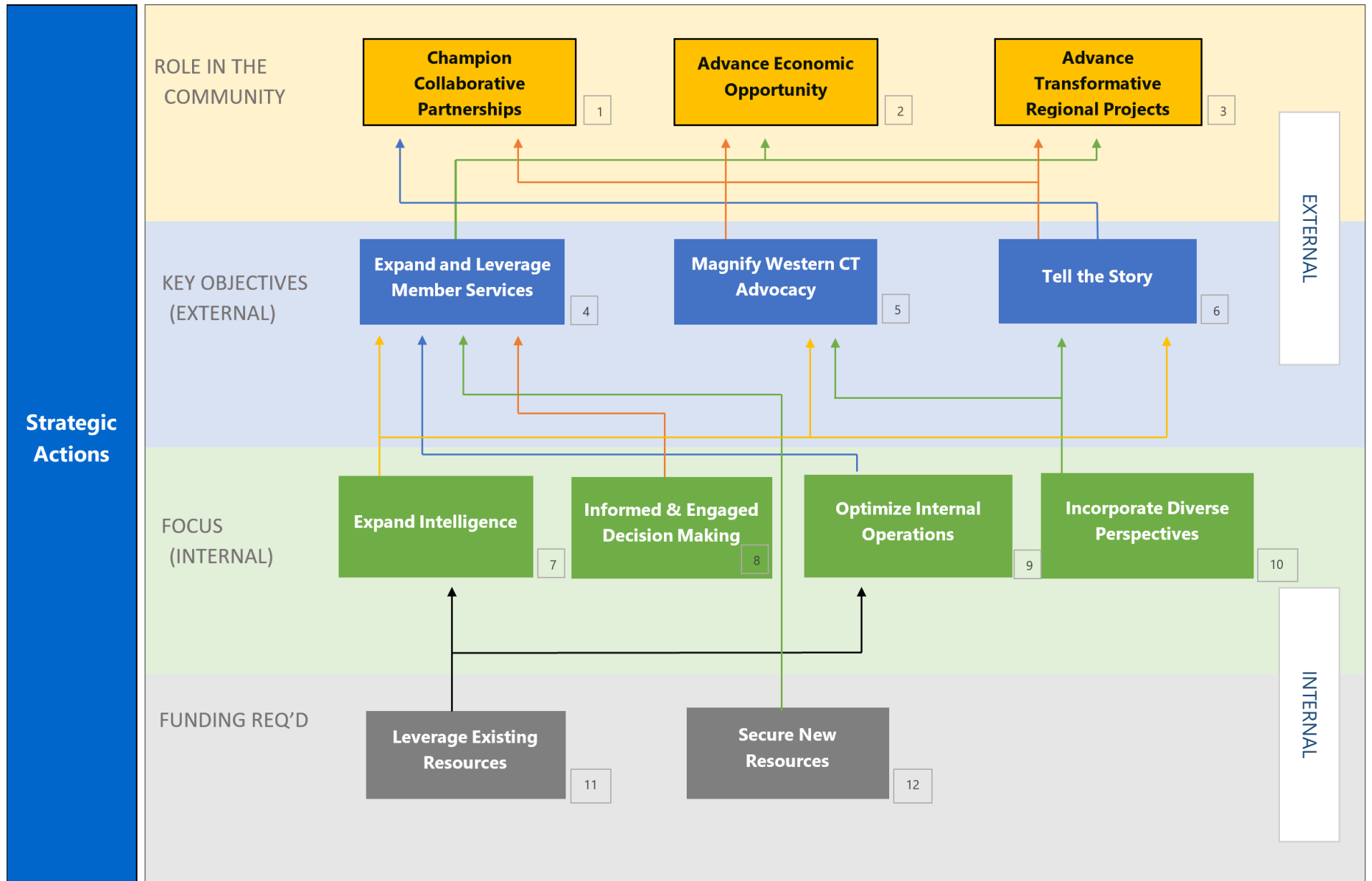
It will have to:

By:

Which will require it to:



WESTCOG STRATEGY MAP



ACTIONS TO ACHIEVE STRATEGIC RESULTS

Each row and individual action (boxes indicated in the map diagram on previous page) of the strategy map is described below along with specific recommendations to take to realize results. Later sections of this report provide specific performance measures for each action to create the full balanced scorecard and dashboard for monitoring performance.

Top Row (Role in the Community)

CHAMPION COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIPS

1

The goal here is to focus on furthering WestCOG's abilities to serve as an objective, knowledgeable, credible, and trusted advisor and teambuilder to all council members, member communities, and regional partners.

ACTION STEPS

- Establish regular bi-annual check ins with key stakeholders and and WestCOG's executive director and/or staff. Regional partners may include but are not limited to the the Connecticut Council Conference of Municipalities, the Connecticut Council of Small Towns, Advance CT, and various state and local legislators.
- Explore and implement a shared collaborative procurement system allowing members to utilize for cost savings and efficiencies.
- Evaluate and improve upon region's emergency management structure with a specific focus on efficiencies gained from combining multiple plans.

METRICS/TARGETS

- New shared service agreements and value/Cost savings to municipalities
- New public/private partnerships, joint ventures, collaborations/Number, size, type, results

ADVANCE ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY

2

Explore opportunities for WestCOG to become more active in regional economic development initiatives separate from and to complement the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.

ACTION STEPS

- Reconvene the economic development district committee more regularly, expand its members, to discuss regional economic development issues. The committee members should be re-evaluated and revised to include representatives and/or economic development executives from member communities, members from the private sector, and representation from other regional economic development-focused organizations (i.e the Connecticut Office of Economic Development, AdvanceCT, etc.).

- Use the meetings to: a) share research and information of interest to all members; b) establish protocols for how to fairly handle economic development leads and prospects; c) discuss collaborative approaches to new programs, policies, and positions affecting economic development throughout the region; and, d) gain support for implementing priorities identified in the CEDS and others as they surface.
- Explore feasibility of conducting/coordinating brownfield remediation assessments and economic impact studies for proposed economic development projects.
- Explore establishing a regional revolving loan program to help establish and grow small businesses.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Increased interest from prospective investors in all parts of region/Number of projects and investment
- Impact to economy due to WCOG efforts/Increased municipal revenues
- Smart growth and equitable job creation/Employment districts-jobs per acre and increased per capita income

ADVANCE TRANSFORMATIVE REGIONAL PROJECTS

3

Identify key projects and initiatives that can have a transformative, positive, impact on the region. These projects can be either physical infrastructure and/or real estate-based or more shared-service in focus. The viability of regional projects will be determined in large measure by positive return on investment. Success and ultimate buy-in of regional services will be driven primarily by a combination of two things: (1) Financial savings that can occur by utilizing regional services, and (2) Enhanced benefits and quality of life for residents in their respective communities. Examples of signature transformative regional projects include:

ACTION STEPS

- Lead and coordinate the planning, financing, and implementation of a signature transportation and/or infrastructure project that has a positive impact on as many municipalities and communities as possible. This project should not only lead to various economic and other community benefits for the region, but also help enhance WestCOG's position in the region as a catalyst and broker of interests.
- Work with Council to identify projects that can be implemented with available Covid-19 pandemic recovery and federal infrastructure monies.
- Produce regional plan for installation and connection to broadband in underserved areas

METRICS/TARGETS

- Prioritize regional projects for ARPA and federal infrastructure funding/Number and value of project funding secured
- Access to broadband internet/Percent population with high-speed connection
- Improved public infrastructure throughout region/Overall condition of public infrastructure

Second Row (Key External Objectives)

Following the key actions to achieve the organization's desired strategic results the strategy map next identifies key objectives that WestCOG must accomplish as an organization (Council and staff) if it is to achieve greater economic prosperity and a higher quality of life in the region.

EXPAND AND LEVERAGE MEMBER SERVICES

4

While WestCOG currently provides on-call engineering contracting services for members to utilize, the organization should identify and pursue additional contracting services through master on-call contracts, or through direct contracting services with WestCOG member communities and consider new fee for service offerings. In determining what to pursue, the staff and Council should consider fit with the Strategic Priorities provided in this Strategic Plan.

ACTION STEPS

- Further research and identify services with the highest value add for member communities in the region. Services identified through stakeholder engagement and various benchmarking analyses include accounting, legal, housing, climate change resiliency, and/or planning services amongst others. Some services might be particularly useful to smaller communities within the western Connecticut region, but ultimately could be leveraged by all members.
- Provide further grant identification and grant writing services to member communities. Grant writing could be done by a dedicated staff member or contracted out through a master on-call contract WestCOG holds for members to utilize. Any future partnerships or mergers should benefit Western Connecticut communities while also allowing WestCOG to be more efficient and potentially bring in additional revenues for the agency.
- Explore options to work more closely or merge with quasi-public agencies and organizations focused on similar initiatives to WestCOG, including entities that sometimes compete for grant funding with WestCOG. Examples may include soil and water conservation districts, or other similar entities with specific environmental or planning focus to WestCOG.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Expansion of services provided/Number, Value, and ROI of services rendered

MAGNIFY WESTERN CONNECTICUT ADVOCACY

5

Enhance advocacy efforts focused on projects at the local, regional, state, and federal levels in order to advance initiatives that will positively impact the quality of life for communities in western Connecticut. WestCOG should look to enhance its community advocacy efforts to continue to build trust and credibility with its members, develop regional and statewide partnerships, and advance key priorities and initiatives in the region.

ACTION STEPS

- Provide direct legislative services from staff and form a legislative committee that is focused on keeping a pulse on, forming relationships, and advocating for WestCOG's needs at the state level. Staff legislative services could be performed by the organization's executive director,

with the assistance of an appointed staff member. The legislative committee should be a combination of council members, staff, and/or external stakeholders such as local or regional legislative members.

- Where consensus can be reached, members of the Council or WestCOG's executive director can help advance critical organizational initiatives and enhance community advocacy by pursuing various outreach activities in the form of speaking during public portions of government meetings, writing Op-Ed columns, using social media and developing targeted campaigns, or publishing an advocacy agenda. It is recommended that the first outreach campaign focus on launching the major elements of this strategic plan.
- In 2020, WestCOG and other COGs worked with the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management and the US Census Bureau to be recognized with a county designation at the federal level. While this designation would not give COGS the taxing power of a traditional county, it would allow them to be eligible for additional federal grant money for the organization and its member communities. Knowing this, WestCOG should play a central role in the continued advocacy for this status with state, regional, and local leaders.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Measure WestCOG participation in advancing its priorities/Testimony, presentations, Council-task force and committee members' actions and results, events hosted or sponsored.

TELL THE STORY

6

Provide focused messaging as a region that is a dynamic hub for community planning and collaboration and work jointly with regional and statewide partners to broadcast successes to encourage creative thought and solutions to regional issues that will benefit its member communities.

ACTION STEPS

- Host an annual regional forum to bring together key stakeholders and partners from the region, state, and the New York metro area. This forum would not only bring together various leaders and subject matter experts that could lead to enhanced or new partnerships, but also act as a forum for WestCOG to communicate its mission, values, and key initiatives to partners outside of the organization. In addition to including leaders from member communities, the following organizations and/or groups should be included, amongst others:
 - The Connecticut Office of Policy and Management
 - The Connecticut Office of Economic Development
 - The Connecticut Council Conference of Municipalities
 - The Connecticut Council of Small Towns
 - Advance CT
 - Various state and local legislators.
- A robust communications strategy will be key to launching the organization's strategic planning initiatives, while also positioning the organization for further community advocacy efforts. Furthermore, it will help regional stakeholders become more aware of WestCOG as an organization, its accomplishments, and the initiatives that it aims to achieve offering continued opportunities for partnerships.

Prepare an organizational communications strategy that outlines specific mediums that WestCOG will use to engage with its stakeholders, in addition to an engagement strategy. The purpose of the communications strategy is to outline approaches to promote positive messaging, advance knowledge amongst members of the organization, WestCOG representatives, and the general public. Elements of the communications strategy will be utilized by the organization, and should be leveraged by council members to communicate key initiatives and priorities at local community meetings and other regional forums.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Produce Annual Communications Plan/Measure results as identified in the plan
- Information sharing with stakeholders/Frequency and audience reach (numbers)
- Publicize Annual State of the Region report (see 7 below). Utilize the annual reporting process to promote accomplishments, define new objectives when needed, and articulate value that the organization brings to its members and the larger community through a mix of anecdotal data and measurable metrics.

Third Row (Internal Focus)

Following key objectives, the next level of the strategy map recognizes that change does not happen magically. It must be managed internally with a focus on new ways of conducting business. These elements focus on specific internal, process-oriented changes that will be needed to realize the organization's strategic priorities.

EXPAND INTELLIGENCE

7

Develop research and development capacity and build in opportunities throughout the organization for continuous idea generation. This will bring forward creative thinking and present staff and Council members with alternative ways of approaching old and new challenges.

ACTION STEPS

- Develop, review, and sign an official memorandum of understanding with the Metropolitan Planning Organizations to share research, and articulate alignment of services, goals, and mission for the region.
- Explore financial and other benefits of merging and redesignating MPOs into one Western Connecticut MPO.
- Jointly with stakeholder organizations, agree upon, collect, and analyze key outputs and outcomes of programs and initiatives with regional impact. Such metrics might include: percent of population using public transportation, travel times to other communities and employment centers, vehicles miles traveled per capita, congestion levels, cost of living, ratio of housing price to income, and more.
- Produce climate change resiliency plan for region.
- Consider role for WestCOG in addressing workforce housing availability and affordability.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Collect/assemble key quality of life and economic metrics for region/Co-Produce Annual State of Western Connecticut Report.

INFORMED & ENGAGED DECISION MAKING

8

The operations plan must incorporate annual review of the strategy map and use of the balanced scorecard to enable crucial conversations around outstanding challenges and initiatives, while also monitoring progress of key initiatives and strategy elements.

ACTION STEPS

- Expand the role of the Executive Committee to help guide and implement the annual strategic planning process.
- Use the Balanced Scorecard as a blueprint to guide immediate, short-and-long-term strategic planning activities of the Council. The Scorecard should be utilized in the context of the the Strategy Map (i.e what has been done, what will be done, how we're measuring success, and what success looks like in the future). The annual reporting process should include a concise, clear, and highly visual summary that can be utilized by the organization and its members for distribution across the region on an annual basis.
- Revamp existing monthly meetings with WestCOG's council to catalyze enhanced engagement. While existing monthly council meetings are generally well attended, there are opportunities to enhance meetings to achieve better outcomes for members and their communities, including:
 - Invite different subject matter experts and stakeholders from the region and NYC metro area to speak with the Council and provide additional expertise on high priority issues.
 - Provide an opportunity for council members to provide regular updates on regional initiatives and to regularly communicate and discuss various community challenges and opportunities.
 - Provide additional presentations by WestCOG staff and the organization's executive director focused on high-priority elements of the strategic plan, as well as ad-hoc challenges or other policy areas that are of interest to council members.
- Continue to engage the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) through regular virtual meetings, while also hosting 1-2 in-person extended meetings each year where members can talk further about regional issues, opportunities to collaborate, and get to know one another further through informal events (coffee hour, happy hour, etc.).

METRICS/TARGETS

- Attendance and participation rates/Increased involvement of each member (heavy, medium, light)
- Scorecard Measures/Status of Actual versus Target Goals

INCORPORATE DIVERSE PERSPECTIVES

9

In its Executive Retreat to develop the foundations for this Strategic Plan, WestCOG Council affirmed the importance of inclusion in addition to the value of diversity in bringing about the vision of a more harmonious and prosperous region. The Council agreed to "build-in" new ways to identify

possible institutional biases and to bring new voices into WestCOG to assure that all segments of the community have opportunities to participate in advancing the mission of the organization.

ACTION STEPS

- Form a subcommittee that focuses on equity and inclusivity in the WestCOG region. The committee should focus on developing clear and achievable goals and objectives that can help inform WestCOG's future efforts. The committee should include a diverse mix of internal and external stakeholders from across the WestCOG region.
- Look for continued ways to bring in perspectives from WestCOG community members through consultation on various issues and projects. Perspectives should include a diverse mix of internal and external stakeholders from across the WestCOG region.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Measures of inequality of income or wealth (i.e. Gini Coefficients)/Narrow gaps between different segments of community
- Diversity representation with staff and Council/Increased participation

OPTIMIZE INTERNAL OPERATIONS

10

A key challenge for many organizations is to make sure that their programs and initiatives fulfill the stated mission and vision. Unfortunately, over time, too many groups experience mission creep by taking on ad hoc duties and activities that become standard programs, which can operate well beyond their most effective timeframes. This can contribute to producing an organization that is focused more on the outputs than outcomes. The purpose for the Strategy Map and Balanced Scorecard is to "tie it altogether" with a focus on clear objectives to meet high-level goals. The Council was clear that to be most effective with leadership and direction, it needed to have more touch points with staff and knowledge of the different programs and activities assigned to staff.

ACTION STEPS

- Have dedicated staff member(s) assigned to service one or multiple communities in the region. Staff members should be in charge of staying on top of key issues and opportunities, having regular check-ins with municipal leaders, attending and/or speaking at community meetings when needed, and being the day-to-day point of contact for their respective member communities.
- On an annual basis, host an in-person forum for Council representatives and staff to get together to get to know one another, and discuss various ongoing initiatives in the region in an informal setting.
- Together with the Executive Director, the Council should periodically review program and service offerings to determine which, if any, should be discontinued to reallocate resources to areas of higher need and impact to the region.
- Prepare a report for WestCOG's Council that discusses challenges and benefits of the existing office leasing situation, and future options.
- Continue to focus on providing high-value and quality transportation and environmental planning services. It is important that WestCOG continue to focus on the organization's core competencies and continue to leverage them as it looks to grow in the future.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Survey of employees/High-level satisfaction
- Survey of municipal services/High-level satisfaction
- Annual review of WestCOG programs and services/Programs with High-Impact Results

Fourth Row (Funding)

Following key internal processes, the next level of the strategy map focuses on the linkage of which changes require new funding versus leveraging existing resources.

LEVERAGE EXISTING RESOURCES

11

Support fiscally sustainable services to deliver consistent and high-quality outcomes to its member communities.

ACTION STEPS

- Due to sound fiscal management by its predecessor organizations, in addition to a continued focus on fiscal management of the organization on an ongoing basis, WestCOG has accumulated a significant unassigned fund balance. In 2020, the unassigned fund balance stood at just over \$2.0 million, or approximately 120% of total fiscal year expenditures. It is recommended that WestCOG establishes a fund balance policy, and have members formally approve a fund balance policy for the organization. The fund balance policy should focus on maintaining adequate reserves for the organization while establishing a regular process to review funds and determine their eligibility to help execute various aspects of the organization's strategic plan.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate permanent work-from-home policies and any cost savings that could be realized and utilized elsewhere through the downsizing of the organization's existing office footprint.

METRICS/TARGETS

- Retain and increase public sector funding/Ratio of public to private funding
- Retain and increase private sector funding/Ratio of private to public funding

SECURE NEW RESOURCES

12

Identify and pursue new funding opportunities for its member communities that will help advance initiatives important to the region.

ACTION STEPS

- In 2020, WestCOG and other COGs have been working with the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management and the US Census Bureau to be recognized with a county designation at the federal level. While this designation would not give COGS the taxing power of a traditional

county, it would allow them to be eligible for additional federal grant money for the organization and its member communities to utilize. Knowing this, WestCOG should play a central role in the continued advocacy for this status with state, regional, and local leaders while continuing to work to analyze and pursue any additional grant opportunities that would align with the organization's overall goals and vision. These funds will be crucial if WestCOG is to play an enhanced role in providing regional services to member communities.

- Explore opportunities to leverage additional funding being disbursed by federal and state governments as a result of the Covid-19 recovery effort and possible new infrastructure monies.
- Develop strategies to further utilize the WestCOG Foundation to raise funds from various philanthropic sources throughout the region.
- Begin to research and collaborate with local, regional, and statewide stakeholders to develop a series of options regarding the potential for a future dedicated funding source that WestCOG and other COGs can leverage consistently on an annual basis.
- Evaluate fee for services programming, i.e. management fee for administering collective purchasing programs, economic impact studies for economic development projects.
- Evaluate options for conservatively investing WestCOG's unobligated funds to generate revenues for the COG.
- Explore future office leasing or buying options that align with the organization's new remote work policy while also potentially benefitting the organization financially (i.e ownership and sub-leasing options).

METRICS/TARGETS

- New sources of revenue and Fee for Services/Ten percent YTY increases.



MANAGING FOR SUCCESS



Western Connecticut Council of Governments

BALANCED SCORECARD

Vision	Our communities work harmoniously to ensure all residents enjoy the highest levels of satisfaction for quality of life and economic prosperity in the Northeast.					
Mission	We work collaboratively with government and civic leaders to ensure exceptional delivery of public services for Western Connecticut.					
Values	Collaboration	Communication	Credibility	Inclusivity	Innovation	Trust
Strategic Priorities	Economic Development Coordination	Regional Partnerships	Transformative Regional Projects	Community Advocacy	Equitable Growth	Fiscal Stability
Strategic Results	Economic Vitality			High Quality of Life		
Strategic Objectives	Strategy Map			Metrics/Targets		
	<div>Champion Collaborative Partnerships</div> <div>Advance Economic Opportunity</div> <div>Advance Transformative Regional Projects</div>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - New Shared Service Agreements/Municipal Cost Savings - New PPPs, Joint Ventures, Collaborations/Number, Size, Type, Results - Increased Interest from Prospective Investors/# Projects and Investment - Impact to Economy/Increased Municipal Revenue - Smart Growth & Equitable Job Creation/Jobs per Area, Per Capita Income - Prioritize Federal Funding/# of Projects and Value of Funding Secured - Access to Broadband/% Population with High-Speed Connection - Improved Public Infrastructure/Condition of Public Infrastructure 		
	<div>Expand and Leverage Member Services</div> <div>Magnify Western CT Advocacy</div> <div>Tell the Story</div>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Expansion of Services Provided/#, Value, ROI - Advancement of Priorities/# testimonies, presentations, events and consequent actions and results - Annual Communications Plan/Measured Results - Information Sharing/Frequency and Reach - Publicize Annual State of the Region Report/Audience Reach 		
	<div>Expand Intelligence</div> <div>Informed & Engaged Decision Making</div> <div>Optimize Internal Operations</div> <div>Incorporate Diverse Perspectives</div>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assemble and Collect Quality of Life Indicators/Co-Produce Annual State of the Region Report - Attendance and Participation Rates/Increased Member Involvement - Track Balanced Scorecard Measures/Status of Actual vs Target Goals - Measures of Inequality of Income or Wealth/Narrow gaps between different segments of community - Diversity representation with staff and Council/Increased participation - Surveys of WestCOG employees and of municipal services/High level satisfaction - Annual Program Review/Programs with High-Impact Results 		
	<div>Leverage Existing Resources</div> <div>Secure New Resources</div>			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Retain and increase public sector funding/Ration of public to private funding - Retain and increase private sector funding/Ratio of private to public funding - New Sources of Revenue and Fee for Services/Ten percent increase YTY 		

COUNCIL PLAN

GOVERNANCE OVERVIEW

WestCOG is governed by a council of 18 Mayors and First Selectment. Each WestCOG member municipality is entitled to one representative and one vote on the council. The Council retains all rights and authority subject to all of the responsibilities and duties granted to and required of regional councils of governments under the General Statutes of the State of Connecticut, as amended, or by special acts of the Connecticut General Assembly. The Council may receive funds from the federal, state and municipal governments but is not authorized to levy taxes.

The Council is led by an Executive Committee of four officers and, optionally, at-large members who provide policy direction and work closely with the Executive Director to oversee programmatic implementation. The executive committee has the following powers and duties:

- Supervises the annual audit of the financial records of the Council.
- Select and adjust the salary of an Executive Director subject to the approval of the Council.
- The Executive Committee in cooperation with the Executive Director shall have the authority to create and discontinue staff positions of the Council except that of the Executive Director, subject to the approval of the Council.
- The Executive Committee shall develop procedures to be used for awarding of contracts and all non-recurring expenditures above five thousand dollars (\$5,000), subject to the approval of the Council. Such procedures shall be in accordance with applicable federal and state regulations, guidance, and requirements.
- The Executive Committee shall be responsible for carrying out policy decisions made by the Council.
- The Executive Committee shall have such other duties as are assigned to it by the Council as required for the management of the business affairs of the Council and consistent with the Connecticut General Statutes and these bylaws.

WestCOG hosts two federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs), which meet jointly and whose combined boundaries are in alignment with those of the area WestCOG serves.

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Per Strategy Map/Balanced Scorecard:

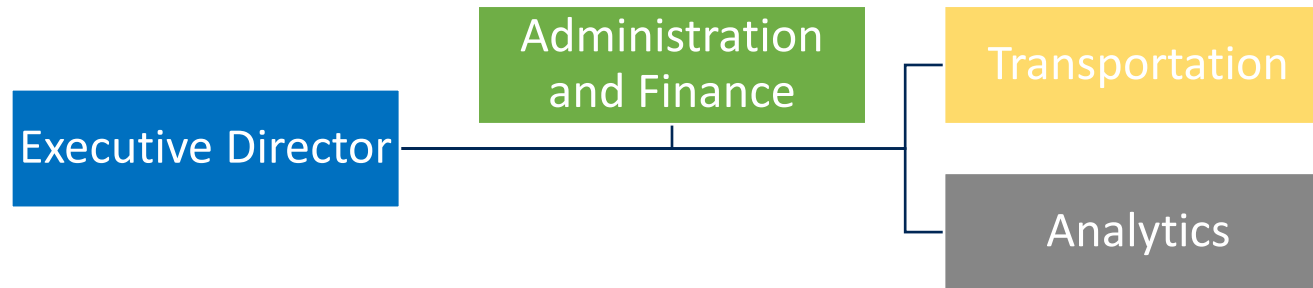
- Form a subcommittee that focuses on equity and inclusivity in the WestCOG region. The committee should focus on developing clear and achievable goals and objectives that can help inform WestCOG's future efforts. The committee should include a diverse mix of internal and external stakeholders from across the WestCOG region.
- Look for continued ways to bring in perspectives from WestCOG community members through consultation on various issues and projects. Perspectives should include a diverse mix of internal and external stakeholders from across the WestCOG region.

- Explore future office leasing options for WestCOG. Initial analysis should be performed that takes into consideration WestCOG’s remote work policy, and also potential options in regard to leveraging future facilities for revenue generation (i.e. potential leasing, ownership, or ownership and sub-leasing options).
- On an annual basis, host an in-person forum for Council representatives and staff to get together to get to know one another, and discuss various ongoing initiatives in the region in an informal setting.
- Together with the Executive Director, the Council should periodically review program and service offerings to determine which, if any, should be discontinued to reallocate resources to areas of higher need and impact to the region.
- Expand the role of the Executive Committee to help guide and implement the annual strategic planning process.
- Use the Balanced Scorecard as a blueprint to guide immediate, short-and-long-term strategic planning activities of the Council. The Scorecard should be utilized in the context of the the Strategy Map (i.e what has been done, what will be done, how we’re measuring success, and what success looks like in the future). The annual reporting process should include a concise, clear, and highly visual summary that can be utilized by the organization and its members for distribution across the region on an annual basis.
- Revamp existing monthly meetings with WestCOG’s council to catalyze enhanced engagement. While existing monthly council meetings are generally well attended, there are opportunities to enhance meetings to achieve better outcomes for members and their communities, including:
 - Invite different subject matter experts and stakeholders from the region and NYC metro area to speak with the Council and provide additional expertise on high priority issues.
 - Provide an opportunity for council members to provide regular updates on regional initiatives and to regularly communicate and discuss various community challenges and opportunities.
 - Provide additional presentations by WestCOG staff and the organization’s executive director focused on high-priority elements of the strategic plan, as well as ad-hoc challenges or other policy areas that are of interest to council members.
- Continue to engage the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) through regular virtual meetings, while also hosting 1-2 in-person extended meetings each year where members can talk further about regional issues, opportunities to collaborate, and get to know one another further through informal events (coffee hour, happy hour, etc.).
- Where consensus can be reached, members of the Council or WestCOG’s executive director can help advance critical organizational initiatives and enhance community advocacy by pursuing various outreach activities in the form of speaking during public portions of government meetings, writing Op-Ed columns, using social media and developing targeted campaigns, or publishing an advocacy agenda. It is recommended that the first outreach campaign focus on launching the major elements of this strategic plan.
- Establish regular bi-annual check ins with key stakeholders and and WestCOG’s executive director and/or staff. Regional partners may include but are not limited to the the Connecticut Council Conference of Municipalities, the Connecticut Council of Small Towns, Advance CT, and various state and local legislators.
- Explore and implement a shared collaborative procurement system allowing members to utilize for cost savings and efficiencies.

MANAGEMENT AND OPERATIONS PLAN

WESTCOG STAFF

At the time of this strategy, WestCOG has ten full-time and three part-time employees. The following is an overview of the organization's current organizational structure:



Administration and Finance	
Position	Summary of Duties
Executive Director	Organizational executive decisionmaker
Financial Manager	Finance and general administration
Office Manager	Office coordination and human resources

Transportation	
Position	Summary of Duties
Department Head and Principal Planner	Transportation Studies, MPO administration, Technical Advisory Group
Senior Project Manager	Project Engineering, Programming, and Solicitation (e.g. LOTCIP, TAP,) Congestion Management
Senior Planner	Transportation Studies, Transit Planning

Planner	Transportation Studies, Planners' Lunch, Land Use Referrals, Transportation Data Collection Program, Regional Plan of Conservation and Development, Wireless Telecommunications
Associate Planner	Transportation Studies, TIP, Title VI Coordinator, Emergency Management
Senior Project Manager	Regional Plan of Conservation & Development
Project Manager	Recreational Trails

Analytics	
Position	Summary of Duties
Department Head and Deputy Director	Human Resources, Analytics, GIS, Regional Services, Environmental Planning, WCEDD Coordination
GIS Analyst	Analytics and GIS
GIS Analyst	Analytics and GIS

WESTCOG SERVICES AND PROGRAMMING OVERVIEW

1. REGIONAL PLANNING & COORDINATION

- Regional Comprehensive Plan Development and Coordination
- Conservation and Development Planning
- Municipal Zoning and Land Use Review
- Regional Shared Services and Modernization Studies
- Grant Application Review and Letters of Support
- Facilitation of Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force
- Facilitation of Planners Lunch

2. TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- Facilitation of Technical Advisory Group (TAG)
- Coordination with Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs)
 - i. Transportation Improvement Program (TIP)
 - ii. Long-range transportation planning (LRTP)
- Participation in Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committees
- Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program Facilitation
- Municipal Planning, Engineering, and Transportation Assistance

- Regional Transportation Safety Planning
- Congestion Management Analysis
- Comprehensive Trail Planning
- Bicycle Network Planning

3. ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

- MS4 Stormwater Planning
- Regional Conservation Support Services

4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- Western CT Economic Development District (WCEDD) Facilitation
- Comprehensive Economic Development (CEDs) Facilitation and Monitoring

5. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- Regional Emergency response planning and mitigation
- Covid-19 response and recovery planning
- Hazard mitigation planning
- Climate resiliency planning

6. DATA ANALYTICS

- Transportation-related data collection and facilitation
- Regional GIS Viewer operation and maintenance
- Transportation Data Collection and Facilitation
- Member community analytics and technical services
- COG regional analytics and technical services
- Internal regional services analytics and technical services

WESTCOG SERVICES AND PROGRAMMING DESCRIPTIONS

1. REGIONAL PLANNING & COORDINATION

- **Regional comprehensive plan development.** WestCOG is responsible for the creation and maintenance of a regional comprehensive plan.
- **Conservation and development planning.** WestCOG developed and adopted its first regional plan of conservation and development in 2020. The plan identifies and aims to influence development toward the priorities of the region for the next ten years.

- **Municipal zoning and land use review.** WestCOG reviews proposed changes to municipal zoning regulations and maps, subdivision ordinances, and plans of conservation development.
- **Regional shared services studies.** WestCOG is focusing on a variety of regional shared services studies, including:
 - Pandemic response
 - Economic recovery development
 - Public safety operations
 - Infrastructure finance
 - GIS systems and IT architecture integration
 - Shared procurement system
 - Animal control
 - Water management
- **Grant Application Review and Letters of Support.** WestCOG reviews and issues letters of support for municipal, private, and non-profit organizations for grant applications that are in alignment with COG goals.
- **Facilitation of Land Use Planning for Wireless Telecommunications Task Force:** Develop a coordinated strategy to make the region a digital leader in broadband implementation.
- **Facilitation of Planners Lunch:** WestCOG convenes regular educational and collaborative sessions for municipal planners to build capacity and facilitate inter-municipal collaboration in the region.

2. TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- **Facilitation of Technical Advisory Group (TAG):** A body of municipal planners, engineers, PW officials, transit district reps, and COG staff. Collectively reviews and evaluates proposals, including prioritizing federal and state-funded project solicitations.
- **Metropolitan Planning Organizations (MPOs):** WestCOG hosts two MPOs, the Housatonic Valley and the South Western CT Metropolitan Planning Organizations. These MPOs together comprise the WestCOG Board, in addition to transit representatives, the COG executive director, and the CT Department of Transportation. The two MPOs functionally operate as one region, with joint and concurrent meetings and shared documents. A primary initiative of the MPOs is to develop and maintain a long-range transportation (LRTP) and transportation improvement (TIP) program.
- **Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program Facilitation.** WestCOG solicits and develops projects for the Local Transportation Capital Improvement Program (LOTICIP).
- **Municipal Planning, Engineering, and Transportation Assistance.** WestCOG provides technical municipal transportation and engineering assistance to the region. Includes programmatic and funding guidance, engineering review, planning studies, and data analysis.

- **Congestion Management Analysis.** WestCOG runs the congestion management process for western Connecticut. This program identifies, benchmarks, and quantifies congestion in the region to leverage future investment and improvements to alleviate congestion in a targeted cost-efficient manner.
- **Regional Transportation Safety Planning.** WestCOG works with CTDOT and others to develop a regional plan aimed at reducing transportation-related fatalities and injuries.
- **Trail Planning.** WestCOG is developing an inventory on trails and their use in the region.
- **Bicycle Network Planning.** WestCOG is developing a regional bicycle plan that will advance the connected bicycle network in the region.
- **Participation in Regional Transportation Technical Advisory Committees.** WestCOG actively participates in numerous transportation advisory committees in the region.

3. ENVIRONMENTAL PLANNING

- **Regional Conservation Support Services.** WestCOG is working to incorporate energy, land, and water conservation practices into planning by providing data to regional conservation groups and member municipalities.
- **MS4 Stormwater Planning Services.** WestCOG provides MS4 stormwater planning services in the region.

4. ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- **Western CT Economic Development District Facilitation.** The Western CT Economic Development District (WCEDD) is a state-designated district that serves regional economic interests for WestCOG's member communities. The group meets quarterly and is tasked with the creation and updates of a comprehensive economic development strategy (CEDS) for the region.

5. EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- **Regional Emergency response mitigation.** WestCOG works with the Department of Energy and Homeland Security, member communities, and neighboring COGs to prepare and plan for regional emergency response and mitigation.
- **COVID-19 response and recovery planning.** WestCOG is currently working in multiple capacities to help understand the impacts of the recent pandemic and develop recovery planning.
- **Hazard mitigation planning.** WestCOG has worked with member communities to create the region's first hazard mitigation plan.
- **Climate resiliency planning.** WestCOG is working with partners to identify coastal and flood-related needs, catalog projects, and develop detailed resiliency projects for the region.

6. REGIONAL PLANNING ANALYTICS

- **Regional GIS Viewer.** WestCOG created and maintains a regional GIS viewer that maps parcels in conjunction with other layers of interest to municipalities, businesses, and the public.

- **Transportation Data Collection and Facilitation.** WestCOG runs a regional data collection program through the installation of traffic cameras. Data is used in many analyses focused on transportation planning.
- **Member community analytics and technical services.** WestCOG provides regional web-based analytics, mapping services, technical support, and training for member communities. Services include:
 - Analysis requests
 - Map design requests
 - Data visualization requests
 - GIS data inventory
 - Large scale printing services
- **Internal regional services analytics and technical services.** WestCOG develops its own regional planning data sets including:
 - Parcels
 - Zoning
 - Wetlands
 - Land use
 - Canopy coverage
 - Critical assets
 - Intersections

AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Per Strategy Map/Balanced Scorecard

- Establish regular bi-annual check ins with key stakeholders and and WestCOG's executive director and/or staff. Regional partners may include but are not limited to the the Connecticut Council Conference of Municipalities, the Connecticut Council of Small Towns, Advance CT, and various state and local legislators.
- Explore and implement a shared collaborative procurement system allowing members to utilize for cost savings and efficiencies.
- Evaluate and improve upon region's emergency management structure with a specific focus on efficiencies gained from combining multiple plans.
- Reconvene the economic development district committee more regularly, expand its members, to discuss regional economic development issues. The committee members should be re-evaluated and revised to include representatives and/or economic development executives from member communities, members from the private sector, and representation from other regional economic development-focused organizations (i.e the Connecticut Office of Economic Development, AdvanceCT, etc.).
- Use the meetings to: a) share research and information of interest to all members; b) establish protocols for how to fairly handle economic development leads and prospects; c) discuss collaborative approaches to new programs, policies, and positions affecting economic development throughout the region; and, d) gain support for implementing priorities identified in the CEDS and others as they surface.

- Explore feasibility of conducting/coordinating brownfield remediation assessments and economic impact studies for proposed economic development projects.
- Explore establishing a regional revolving loan program to help establish and grow small businesses.
- Explore new leasing or other options for WestCOG's office.
- Lead and coordinate the planning, financing, and implementation of a signature transportation and/or infrastructure project that has a positive impact on as many municipalities and communities as possible. This project should not only lead to various economic and other community benefits for the region, but also help enhance WestCOG's position in the region as a catalyst and broker of interests.
- Work with Council to identify projects that can be implemented with available Covid-19 pandemic recovery and federal infrastructure monies.
- Produce regional plan for installation and connection to broadband in underserved areas.
- Further research and identify services with the highest value add for member communities in the region. Services identified through stakeholder engagement and various benchmarking analyses include accounting, legal, housing, climate change resiliency, and/or planning services amongst others. Some services might be particularly useful to smaller communities within the western Connecticut region, but ultimately could be leveraged by all members.
- Provide further grant identification and grant writing services to member communities. Grant writing could be done by a dedicated staff member or contracted out through a master on-call contract WestCOG holds for members to utilize.
- Host an annual regional forum to bring together key stakeholders and partners from the region, state, and the New York metro area. This forum would not only bring together various leaders and subject matter experts that could lead to enhanced or new partnerships, but also act as a forum for WestCOG to communicate its mission, values, and key initiatives to partners outside of the organization. In addition to including leaders from member communities, the following organizations and/or groups should be included, amongst others:
 - The Connecticut Office of Policy and Management
 - The Connecticut Office of Economic Development
 - The Connecticut Council Conference of Municipalities
 - The Connecticut Council of Small Towns
 - Advance CT
 - Various state and local legislators.
- A robust communications strategy will be key to launching the organization's strategic planning initiatives, while also positioning the organization for further community advocacy efforts. Furthermore, it will help regional stakeholders become more aware of WestCOG as an organization, its accomplishments, and the initiatives that it aims to achieve offering continued opportunities for partnerships.

Prepare an organizational communications strategy that outlines specific mediums that WestCOG will use to engage with its stakeholders, in addition to an engagement strategy. The purpose of the communications strategy is to outline approaches to promote positive messaging, advance knowledge amongst members of the organization, WestCOG representatives, and the general public. Elements of the

communications strategy will be utilized by the organization, and should be leveraged by council members to communicate key initiatives and priorities at local community meetings and other regional forums.

- Develop, review, and sign an official memorandum of understanding with the Metropolitan Planning Organizations to share research, and articulate alignment of services, goals, and mission for the region.
- Explore financial and other benefits of merging and redesignating MPOs into one Western Connecticut MPO.
- Jointly with stakeholder organizations, agree upon, collect, and analyze key outputs and outcomes of programs and initiatives with regional impact. Such metrics might include: percent of population using public transportation, travel times to other communities and employment centers, vehicles miles traveled per capita, congestion levels, cost of living, ratio of housing price to income, and more.
- Produce climate change resiliency plan for region.
- Consider role for WestCOG in addressing workforce housing availability and affordability.
- Have dedicated staff member(s) assigned to service one or multiple communities in the region. Staff members should be in charge of staying on top of key issues and opportunities, having regular check-ins with municipal leaders, attending and/or speaking at community meetings when needed, and being the day-to-day point of contact for their respective member communities.
- On an annual basis, host an in-person forum for Council representatives and staff to get together to get to know one another, and discuss various ongoing initiatives in the region in an informal setting.
- Continue to monitor and evaluate permanent work-from-home policies and any cost savings that could be realized and utilized elsewhere through the downsizing of the organization's existing office footprint.
- Explore opportunities to leverage additional funding being disbursed by federal and state governments as a result of the Covid-19 recovery effort and possible new infrastructure monies.
- Develop strategies to further utilize the WestCOG Foundation to raise funds from various philanthropic sources throughout the region.
- Begin to research and collaborate with local, regional, and statewide stakeholders to develop a series of options regarding the potential for a future dedicated funding source that WestCOG and other COGs can leverage consistently on an annual basis.
- Evaluate fee for services programming, i.e. management fee for administering collective purchasing programs, economic impact studies for economic development projects.

RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT PLAN

FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

WestCOG is considered a single-program governmental organization for financial reporting purposes, with a fiscal year running from July 1st to June 30th of each year. On an annual basis, WestCOG's management is responsible for the preparation of the organization's financial statements in accordance with accounting principles generally accepted in the United States. WestCOG's financial statements are audited annually by a third party, with the most recent audit of the year-end (YE) 2020 financials being prepared by Henry, Raymond, and Thompson. Since its inception, WestCOG has never failed or had significant findings in any of its financial statements.

ANNUAL BUDGET

WestCOG's bylaws require that the organization's annual budget is presented to the Council for final approval in June for the following fiscal year. A draft budget is sent to the Council on or before the Council's December monthly meeting. The draft budget advanced to the Council is based upon a detailed chart of expenditure accounts.

MEMBER CONTRIBUTIONS

In December of each year, preliminary assessments for all participating Members are established by the Council upon the recommendation of the Executive Committee to assist in the municipal and state budgeting process for the ensuing fiscal year. Preliminary assessments are determined by comparing the Member's population to that of the aggregate population of all Council Members. The population is determined by the latest U.S. Census or by the most recent State Department of Public Health and Addiction Services. Member contributions in fiscal year 2020-2021 totaled \$300,000, which equated to approximately 15% of WestCOG's total anticipated revenue in 2020.

ANNUAL FUNDING

Under the direction of the Treasurer, the Executive Director of WestCOG, or his or her designee facilitates the receipt of all funds. Funds and contributions to WestCOG may be received by the Council for its use and purposes from local, state, and federal governments and any other source deemed acceptable by a majority vote of the Council. WestCOG receives most of its funding from the state and federal government in support of its MPO transportation planning functions. Funding from both governments is primarily received in the form

Fiscal Year 2020-2021 Member Contributions		
	Total	% of Total
Community	Contribution	Contribution
Bethel	\$ 9,527	3%
Bridgewater	\$ 4,978	2%
Brookfield	\$ 9,786	3%
Danbury	\$ 32,648	11%
Darien	\$ 8,986	3%
Greenwich	\$ 28,887	10%
New Canaan	\$ 11,231	4%
New Fairfield	\$ 9,242	3%
New Milford	\$ 24,045	8%
Newtown	\$ 23,379	8%
Norwalk	\$ 28,154	9%
Redding	\$ 11,152	4%
Ridgefield	\$ 15,887	5%
Sherman	\$ 7,018	2%
Stamford	\$ 42,270	14%
Weston	\$ 8,127	3%
Westport	\$ 12,484	4%
Wilton	\$ 12,199	4%
Total	\$ 300,000	100%

Source: WestCOG

of operating grants. WestCOG also receives other funding from state and local sources to perform and coordinate regional planning functions. Additional grants fund special projects supported by the region's mayors and first selectmen.

Operating grants represented approximately \$1.63 million, or 84% of WestCOG's total revenue in 2020, down slightly from previous years. In 2020, funding from the Connecticut State Government (primarily distributed through the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management Regional Services Grant) totaled approximately \$770,000 or 40% of WestCOG's total revenues. In the same year, funding from the federal government (primarily distributed through the U.S Department of Transportation) was approximately \$850,000 or 44% of WestCOG's total revenues.

Total Revenue by Type (2020)		
Program and General Revenues	Total Revenue (2020)	Percent (%) of Total Revenue (2020)
Operating Grants	\$ 1,628,044	84%
Unrestricted Investment Earnings	\$ 11,046	1%
Miscellaneous	\$ 211	<1%
Local Cash Contributions/Dues	\$ 300,000	15%
Total Revenues	\$ 1,939,301	100%

Source: WestCOG 2020-2021 Financial Statements

Revenue by Funding Source (2020)		
Revenue Source	Total Revenue (2020)	Percent (%) of Total Revenue (2020)
Federal Revenue		
US DOT	\$ 773,431	40%
US EDA	\$ 63,301	3%
US DHS	\$ 12,350	1%
Total Federal Revenues	\$ 849,082	44%
State Revenue		
CTDOT	\$ 292,218	15%
Conn OPM	\$ 477,565	25%
Total State Revenues	\$ 769,783	40%
Local Revenue		
Local Other	\$ 9,179	<1%
Local Dues	\$ 300,000	16%
Total Local Revenues	\$ 309,179	16%
Other Revenues	\$ 1,315	<1%
Total Revenue	\$ 1,929,359	100%

Source: WestCOG 2020-2021 Financial Statements

KEY FINANCIAL RISK FACTORS AND MITIGATION STRATEGIES

The following are key strategies that are recommended for WestCOG to help the organization improve its fiscal health and stability:

1. REVENUE DIVERSITY AND DEVELOPMENT OF MORE DISCRETIONARY FUNDS

The majority of funds that WestCOG receives is restricted to the scope of work identified by the grantor; WestCOG does receive generally unrestricted funding that can be used based on the organization's discretion.

- **Local Dues Collected from Member Communities.** On an annual basis, WestCOG's member communities contribute to the organization to help fund its activities. Member contributions are based on a set formula according to each community's population (according to the previous census) and total land area.
- **Connecticut Regional Services Grant.** Each year, the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management (OPM) distributes regional services grants to all Councils of Governments (COGs). As part of the process of the state appropriating these funds annually, COGs meet with OPM to discuss and have funding approved for a specific scope of work. Generally, the state has taken a hands-off approach historically allowing COGs to use funding to address priorities at their discretion, helping them to grow organically in the years after their formation. As the COGs evolve in the future, there is the potential that the State of Connecticut also evolves in regard to its funding strategy and make funding less discretionary and more focused on addressing the state's goals and priorities for the COGs. This new emphasis and coordination by the state could help the COG get a better idea of its role in the region, and initiatives to pursue.
- **Unassigned Fund Balance.** This classification of funds represents the fund balance that has not been assigned to other funds and that has not been restricted, committed, or assigned to specific purposes. At the close of In 2020. As of the close of the 2020 fiscal year, WestCOG's governmental fund reported combined ending fund balances of \$2,017,227, an increase of \$220,076 in comparison with the prior year.
- **Fee for Services.** A review should be conducted of ongoing services and possible new services that might be better positioned as fee for service offerings. For example, this could include shared services for accounting, research, analysis, or other periodic requests that are made of WestCOG.

2. UTILIZE A PORTION OF EXISTING FUND BALANCE AND CREATE A FUND BALANCE POLICY

Due to sound fiscal management by its predecessor organizations, in addition to a continued focus on fiscal management of the organization on an ongoing basis, WestCOG has accumulated a significant unassigned fund balance. In 2020, the unassigned fund balance stood at just over \$2.0 million, or approximately 120% of total fiscal year expenditures. It is recommended that WestCOG establishes a fund balance policy, and have members formally approve a fund balance policy for the organization. The fund balance policy should focus on maintaining adequate reserves for the organization while establishing a regular process to review funds and determine their eligibility to help execute various aspects of the organizations strategic plan.

Additionally, in establishing a policy governing the level of unrestricted fund balance, WestCOG should consider a variety of factors, including:

1. The predictability of its revenues and the volatility of its expenditures (i.e., higher levels of unrestricted fund balance may be needed if significant revenue sources are subject to unpredictable fluctuations or if operating expenditures are highly volatile);
2. Its perceived exposure to significant one-time outlays (e.g., disasters, immediate capital needs, state budget cuts);
3. The potential drain upon general fund resources from other funds, as well as the availability of resources in other funds;
4. The potential impact on the entity's bond ratings and the corresponding increased cost of borrowed funds;
5. Commitments and assignments (i.e., governments may wish to maintain higher levels of unrestricted fund balance to compensate for any portion of unrestricted fund balance already committed or assigned by the government for a specific purpose). Governments may deem it appropriate to exclude from consideration resources that have been committed or assigned to some other purpose and focus on unassigned fund balance, rather than on unrestricted fund balance¹.

Unassigned Fund Balance (2017-2020)			
	2018	2019	2020
Total Revenues	\$ 2,098,265	\$ 2,474,020	\$ 1,939,301
Total Expenses	\$ 1,909,581	\$ 2,261,634	\$ 1,724,427
Increase in Net Position	\$ 188,684	\$ 212,386	\$ 214,874
Fund Balance (Beginning)	\$ 1,384,588	\$ 1,584,881	\$ 1,797,151
Fund Balance (Ending)	\$ 1,584,882	\$ 1,797,151	\$ 2,017,227
Net Change in Fund Balance	\$ 200,294	\$ 212,270	\$ 220,076
Unassigned Fund Balance	\$ 1,584,882	\$ 1,682,413	\$ 2,024,259
Unassigned Fund Balance % of Total Expenses	83%	74%	117%

Source: WestCOG Annual Financial Statements

3. PURSUE OTHER GRANT OPPORTUNITIES

In 2020, WestCOG and other COGs have been working with the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management and the US Census Bureau to be recognized with a county designation at the federal level. While this designation would not give COGS the taxing power of a traditional county, it would allow them to be eligible for additional federal grant money for the organization and its member communities to utilize. Knowing this,

¹ <https://www.gfoa.org/materials/fund-balance-guidelines-for-the-general-fund>

WestCOG should continue to work to analyze and pursue any additional grant opportunities that would align with the organization's overall goals and vision.

Immediate attention should be given to federal resources available through the ARPA and any potential support that might be provided by additional federal support for infrastructure.

4. LOOK AT LONG TERM STAFF STRATEGY AND LOCATION

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, WestCOG's staff has been primarily working from home since the spring of 2020. In interviews and workshops, staff members generally had positive feedback about the work from home experience, and its positive impact on their work/life balance. Knowing this, WestCOG should continue to evaluate the effectiveness and other opportunities associated with this new work model, and if it is sustainable in the long term. These considerations should be evaluated along with the financial savings that may result from any amended leasing arrangements moving forward. WestCOG currently leases space with 1 Riverside Rd Sandy Hook LLC, a limited liability company. The existing lease began in 2016 and is set to expire in April of 2026. On average, WestCOG is expected to pay approximately \$156,800 per year to lease its existing space through 2025.



SUPPLEMENTAL RESEARCH & DELIVERABLES



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1. SWOT ANALYSIS

OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

Developed and refined over the span of the strategic planning and visioning process, the SWOT analysis helped inform a strategies and recommendations outlined in the strategic plan. The SWOT analysis helps provide perspective about where WestCOG as an organization stands today in terms of:

Strengths – What are the organization’s relative competitive advantages? What fuels the organization’s successes? What edge does the organization have as it looks to grow and pursue its goals?

Weaknesses – What are the organization's relative competitive disadvantages? What fuels the organization’s weaknesses? What are the problem areas that the organization must recognize and overcome as it looks to strengthen and grow?

Opportunities – What factors outside of the organization offer the best opportunities for advancing the organization's wellbeing and make it successful?

Threats – What are the external factors that may have the potential to prevent the advancement of the organization's wellbeing and making it successful?

STRENGTHS

- ◆ **Well respected and dedicated Executive Committee.** WestCOG’s Executive committee members are respected and trusted by peers to help guide the organization.
- ◆ **Collaborative and Involved Council.** Specific positive attributes mentioned by numerous internal and external stakeholders include good general attendance of all monthly meetings, well-informed, respectful, non-partisan, and welcoming to new members.
- ◆ **Quality and Expertise of Staff Members.** WestCOG’s staff has a broad range of expertise and experience for communities to leverage. Staff members generally are in tune with municipal needs, and have a regional perspective on activities and initiatives being undertaken. Feedback through interactive workshops, interviews, and surveys indicated that a majority of staff members are happy in their current positions, and with the organization as a whole. Staff members are generally open and communicative with one another; enjoy their current work/life balance; are generally happy with existing levels of compensation, and generally feel like the work they are doing makes an impact in the western Connecticut region.

- ◆ **Financial Record.** WestCOG's positive fiscal conditions can be attributed to strong internal financial management practices, and strong financial reserves carried over from its predecessor organizations. WestCOG has not had any significant audit findings since the organization began. Additionally, WestCOG has very sufficient financial reserves with the most recent financial report reflecting an overall fund balance of \$1.6M (70% of annual expenditures).
- ◆ **Executive Management.** Staff and Council members, in addition to external stakeholders point to the quality of WestCOG's executive management and the direction that the organization has and continues to head. Additionally, Executive management champions collaboration and communication with staff, regularly speaking with and surveying staff members to gauge employee satisfaction and collect feedback.
- ◆ **Relationships with Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Members.** Interviews with various members of WestCOG's Technical Advisory Group (TAG), which is composed of municipal public works executives and staff members, point to WestCOG staff as being professional, responsive, helpful, informative.
- ◆ **Internal Collaboration.** WestCOG's staff is generally open, communicative, and collaborative with one another. Staff generally meets daily and at monthly staff meetings to talk about projects and ongoing challenges. Some mention WestCOG as being the most open organization they've worked for.

CHALLENGES/WEAKNESSES

- ◆ **Direct Community Presence.** Many members of the communities that WestCOG serves are not familiar with the organization, what it does, and what it has accomplished. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 6.
- ◆ **Lack of Implementation Authority.** Some regional partners point to a disconnect between the various transportation and economic plans that the organization develops, and their ability to implement them. Some view WestCOG as an organization that researches and pursues grand plans that for the most part don't get done. Some board members (and some staff) don't like that some studies go on the shelf and nothing happens. There is currently no vision, deliverables, measurables for achievement of goals. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.
- ◆ **Strategic Collaboration Between the Council and Organization.** WestCOG's Council often looks to the organization to inform the directions and initiatives that the organization takes on, but staff looks to the Council to be more proactive in addressing the strategic direction of the organization and the issues that it prioritizes. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.
- ◆ **Familiarity with Organizational Operations Amongst Council Members.** Various Council members cited a gap in onboarding from WestCOG, with new and existing members sometimes being confused about the specifics of the organization (structure, programming, staff reporting, etc.) ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.
- ◆ **Lack of a Forum for Shared Understanding.** Some council members may not have a great understanding of challenges and opportunities within other member municipalities within WestCOG, and sometimes feel like others don't understand theirs. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.

- ◆ **Lack of Value Proposition Understanding.** Some board members do not feel like their communities gain any value from being a part of WestCOG (especially smaller communities). When WestCOG pursues or selects a project to study or implement, some communities feel slighted because their project was not selected, and say they are not communicated with in regard to why. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 6 AND 7.
- ◆ **Lack of Measurable Outcome Systems.** WestCOG currently tracks very few metrics about the work the organization is doing or that it has accomplished. Lack of Staff Objectives and Goals. Staff members are infrequently. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 9.

OPPORTUNITIES

- ◆ **An Enhanced Presence in the Region.** WestCOG currently focuses a majority of its efforts on regional transportation issues. In many interviews, stakeholders shared that they would like to see WestCOG fill the void and take a larger role in the region working to address regional issues and initiatives outside of transportation. While many issues were mentioned, the most common included general economic development, grant writing assistance, various issues stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic, renewable energy planning, affordable/senior housing, enhanced fiber networks, state advocacy). ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 4,5,6.
- ◆ **Regional Shared Service Initiatives.** WestCOG has and is currently executing a series of studies aimed at regional shared services and other initiatives. Examples include a study on regional efficiencies in shared services, shared emergency dispatch services, and regional conservation management planning, amongst others. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 4 AND 7.
- ◆ **Additional Funding Opportunities.** Connecticut's Councils of Government (COGs) have been working with the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management and the Census Bureau to gain county designation. This designation would allow WestCOG to pursue and potentially receive additional federal funding. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 12.
- ◆ **Additional Work/Life Balance for Staff.** A majority of staff are currently working from home due to the COVID-19 pandemic. New work from home and other policies focused on work/life balance for staff that came about due to the pandemic could offer increased work/life balance for staff, and financial savings for the organization if they remain permanent. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 9.
- ◆ **Enhanced Monthly Council Meetings.** WestCOG has an opportunity to revamp existing meeting structure with council to spur engagement. Some have mentioned being interesting in bringing in different experts and stakeholders from the region to speak with the Council to provide additional expertise; additional updates on individual community opportunities and challenges, presentation on state initiatives and advocacy efforts. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.
- ◆ **Enhanced Governance and Committee Structure.** WestCOG, on a limited basis, is engaging directly with member municipalities' public works, planning, and other staff. This engagement is often based on the projects that they're working on, and/or the municipality having this type of staff available for regular meetings (such as TAG meetings that include PW directors). WestCOG currently has no committees or subcommittees looking at particular issues to gather feedback from, and could use this as a mechanism to more regularly engage directly with municipalities. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.
- ◆ **Enhanced Collaboration as an outcome of the strategic planning process.** This strategic plan gives WestCOG and the board an opportunity to come together and form a vision and mission for the organization, what they want to tackle in the long run, how they want

to address each year, and how they will measure results. This will provide them with a roadmap to the future that they can check in with and refine on an annual basis. It will also provide them the information they may need to go through a re-branding exercise to be more outward-facing in the communities they are part of. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 5 AND 6.

- ◆ **Additional On-Call Consulting Services for Members.** WestCOG currently manages a limited number of on-call service contracts for its members to leverage. This could be expanded for engineering and planning consulting services are very helpful for towns and cities who are implementing projects funded by WestCOG. Don't have to go through their normal procurement process. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 9.
- ◆ **Enhanced Stakeholder Engagement.** As a regional organization, WestCOG has the perspective and ability to directly host events that bring together leaders and experts from the region to further collaborate and leverage one another. More events or award ceremonies for first selectman, tag members, etc. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 6, 9,10.
- ◆ **Collaborative Partnerships.** Many key organizations at the state and regional level expressed openness to work more with WestCOG on shared initiatives that address common goals. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 5 AND 6.

THREATS

- ◆ **Negative Perceptions of Regionalism.** Due to historic and existing circumstances, many communities in Connecticut focus on self-sufficiency and are sometimes resistant to change. Members and communities must focus on the good of the collective over the individual. Many municipalities and individuals in the organizations that WestCOG interacts with favor doing things the way they've always been done and can be obstinate to new ideas or approaches to doing things. Municipalities have a lot of power in the State of Connecticut. Very few want to give up any of the powers that they have (especially smaller municipalities) in fear that the services they will then get will not be adequate. They generally want it both ways, benefitting from regional initiatives but not giving up any power in the process. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 5 AND 6.
- ◆ **Reliance on Variable Non-Discretionary Funding Sources.** A majority of WestCOG's existing revenue profile consists of state and federal funds that is variable in nature and based on specific programming. This leaves little room for WestCOG to focus on and pursue initiatives outside of these funding sources. It also leads to uncertainty in staffing the organization. little oversight and no taxing authority. This makes it difficult for COGs to have any teeth when it comes to trying to implement some initiatives. Over the longer term, the economic and structural impacts resulting from the Covid-19 pandemic may adversely affect the revenues of grantors to the Western Connecticut Council of Government. While federal funding has been and is expected to remain stable, State funding historically has varied substantially, and the capacity of the State to fund programs may be constrained in future years. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 12.
- ◆ **Perceptions of Western Connecticut.** Some in the capital region view the southwestern municipalities as not falling in line and thinking of themselves as a separate region of the state given their primary interaction with the New York City Metro Area. Some of these communities are within WestCOG. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTIONS 5 AND 6.

- ◆ **Policy and Funding Uncertainty at the State Level.** With limited guidance and a generally undefined role at the state level, WestCOG and other COG's makes it hard to identify priorities, since they also need to identify what they actually have control of. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 5.
- ◆ **Polarization in Council Meeting Attendance.** In some board meetings, CEO's will send a representative, sometimes not attend meetings, or will not be fully engaged. Some mentioned that the communities that are most engaged in WestCOG are the mid-level municipalities (not the largest or smallest municipalities). ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 8.
- ◆ **Perceived Transparency of project selection process.** Some cities and towns don't feel like WestCOG is transparent in how they select projects, and want better communication as to why they select certain ones to fund. ADDRESSED IN STRATEGY MAP ACTION 6.



2. ORGANIZATIONAL BEST PRACTICE AND BENCHMARKING STUDY

OVERVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

To gain further insights into best practices and other operational considerations of similar organizations outside of Connecticut, a benchmarking and best



practices study was completed. Research into the organizations included as part of this study included a review of online content and resources provided by each organization, in addition to direct interviews with representatives from the organizations. The following organizations were looked at as part of this study:

- ◆ The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) - Massachusetts
- ◆ The Greater Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) - Maine
- ◆ The Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) – New York
- ◆ The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) – Virginia

It should be noted that the intent of this organizational benchmarking study was not to directly compare or rank WestCOG amongst the benchmarking organizations. Simply put, the intent of this study was to gain further insights into programs, policies, and services that other organizations provide in addition to gaining insights into best practices, governance structures, challenges that these organizations have faced, and key elements of their success. In the pages that follow, the organizational profiles include and are organized by the following sections:

- ◆ About the Organization
- ◆ Summary of Programs and Services
- ◆ Summary of Organizational Governance
- ◆ Strategy Consideration and Key Takeaways

Specifically, the strategy consideration and key takeaways section at the end of each profile includes a summary of key takeaways and insights that may be considered and/or leveraged by WestCOG, and in some cases helped inform the strategy recommendations included as part of the broader strategic plan. These strategy considerations were informed by analysis of the organization's programs and services and organizational governance

structure, in addition to further discussion and emphasis from the organization during interviews. The following is a summary of this section for the organizations looked at as a part of this study:

THE FRANKLIN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (FRCOG) – MASSACHUSETTS

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Enhanced committee structure based in some cases on citizen engagement.
- Implementation of shared purchasing system.
- Enhanced role for executive committee members focused on annual, short-term, and long-term strategic planning initiatives.
- Implementation of a formal introduction program for new members or other municipal representatives.
- Regular and direct communication on a regular basis between staff and member communities.
- Enhanced marketing and communication planning and initiatives.
- Enhanced role in structuring and organizing regional emergency management initiatives
- Implementation of fee for service initiatives.
- Enhanced community advocacy at the state level.

THE GREATER PORTLAND COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS (GPCOG) – MAINE

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Enhanced discretionary fund profile.
- Pursuit of impactful, innovative projects.
- Direct participation in community-based projects.
- Enhanced role in regional economic development coordination.
- Enhanced committee structure.
- Formal resolution signaling shared focus on the MPO and COG.

THE CAPITAL DISTRICT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (CDRPC) – NEW YORK

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Enhanced annual strategic planning and reporting process that is utilized to communicate accomplishments, objectives, and articulate value to the communities served.
- Enhanced annual strategic planning process examining what was done, what will be done, how success is being measured, and what success looks like in the future.
- Focus on being known as a regional convener and honest broker by focusing on building trust and leveraging that trust to bring people and communities together around regional goals.

THE THOMAS JEFFERSON PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION (TJPDC) – VIRGINIA

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Focus on enhanced regional and statewide partnerships and collaboration.
- Enhanced legislative advocacy services.
- Enhanced citizen-based committee structure.
- Hosting of regular events and other get-togethers for regional partners and subject matter experts.

FRANKLIN REGIONAL COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Franklin Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG) was established in 1997 as a voluntary organization replacing the county's municipal government after it was dissolved, and currently serves the 26 towns making up rural Franklin County in western Massachusetts. With an annual budget of approximately \$4.0 million dollars in 2020 and approximately 40 staff members, the organization is funded primarily by member contributions, state and federal grants, contract services, other miscellaneous grants, and donations. FRCOG performs various functions for the region but is primarily tasked with providing technical municipal assistance in economic development, urban/regional planning, and related services to its local communities.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

REGIONAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION

- ◆ FRCOG undertakes different efforts to provide land use planning and zoning services, such as inventory of abandoned/vacant property to explore reuse options.
- ◆ FRCOG's collective purchasing program helps communities within its jurisdiction realize fiscal savings through volume discount purchasing, which includes, but is not limited to highway products and services; fuel products; elevator maintenance; and rental equipment.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- ◆ FRCOG provides transportation planning support to its member communities. Primary focuses include updating and maintaining the Franklin County Regional Transportation Plan and publishing various transportation reports related to issues such as electric vehicle charging station demand in the region, regional complete streets evaluations, bike, and ped trail mapping, vision zero, and hazardous intersection mapping.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- ◆ Economic development planning services that the FRCOG provides to municipalities include the development of a regional Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) via the CEDS Program, partnering with stakeholders around issues of economic resiliency, and commissioning economic impact studies. FRCOG also performs brownfield site assessments.
- ◆ In recent years, FRCOG has worked to help to expand broadband access, improve broadband infrastructure, and increasing broadband distribution equity in its member communities.

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- ◆ FRCOG's Emergency Preparedness Program oversees the organization's efforts to support the robust readiness of the region to emergencies through trainings/exercises, coordinating initiatives with first responders, the private sector, and local municipalities, preparing emergency plans, and delivering technical assistance. The Emergency Preparedness Program also coordinates other programs that bolster its mission to ensure the effective delivery of emergency services, including the Franklin County Regional Emergency Planning Committee, the Franklin County Emergency Communication System, and the Mohawk Area Public Health Coalition.
- ◆ FRCOG is a fiduciary of the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Council, which manages the State Homeland Security for four counties, including Franklin County. FRCOG assists with WRHSAC's mission of ensuring enhanced emergency preparedness and protection through conducting duties like program management and project oversight.

EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES

- ◆ FRCOG spearheads the enhancement and promotion of youth well-being, particularly among teenagers, through its program called Partnership for Youth (PFY). The PFY convenes different coalitions of stakeholders, conducts research into evidenced-based programs and environmental strategies to positively influence youth health and behavior, analyzes and provides insights into local youth public health via surveys and program evaluations, and delivers technical assistance.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION PLANNING

- ◆ Examples of the natural resources planning services that the FRCOG provides include the development of a climate change resiliency plan, assisting with green infrastructure development, river restoration/sediment management, river corridor mapping, and pollution mitigation/reduction.

PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICES

- ◆ FRCOG's Cooperative Public Health Service assists local municipalities within Franklin County with public health issues and promotes community well-being through its environmental health inspections that deal with food safety and community sanitation in recreational public spaces and septic systems. The program also provides essential clinical services, including medical testing/health screenings and helping to administer vaccinations in community clinics.

DATA ANALYTICS AND REPORTING

- ◆ FRCOG provides the public with various types of data resources and publications, including annual reports of the organization highlighting accomplishments in each of the municipal services that FRCOG is charged with providing, as well as annual reports on the towns in the region. Many of the publications focus on service-specific areas such as economic development, zoning, and emergency preparedness.

OTHER SERVICES

- ◆ FRCOG assists with the work of a myriad of special projects, including supporting the organization's support for the regional Opioid Task Force, as well as fire department and regional ambulance collaborations.
- ◆ The Franklin County Cooperative Inspection Program conducts different types of inspections, including building, electrical and plumbing/gas for sixteen of the local municipalities of Franklin County.
- ◆ On an operational level, FRCOG has offered its fee-for-service Town Accounting Program for over 15 years, helping to provide accounting-related services to local municipalities.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

FRCOG is managed and governed by the FRCOG Council, a 29-member body consisting of chosen representatives or a Select Board member from each of the twenty-six municipalities within its jurisdiction, in addition to one representative from the Franklin Regional Planning Board and two Regionally Elected members. Many of the members on the Council are town administrators or on the Board of Selectmen in their respective municipality. Regarding voting, the Council uses a simple majority on matters of policy, but for financial issues it uses a weighted majority that takes into consideration the population and taxable property in the communities that the membership represents.

The FRCOG Council is made up of four main subcommittees: Executive, Finance, Personnel, and Special Committees.

- ◆ The Executive Committee, a 5-member committee made up of the two regionally elected members of the main Council, two other Council members and the representative from the Franklin Regional Planning Board, serves as the oversight body for the Executive Director. It also focuses on regional/state/federal issues relevant to the residents of Franklin County, especially since it also acts as the region's Economic Development District Board.
- ◆ The Finance Committee, a 6-member body made up of representatives of towns/areas from across Franklin County who are chosen from the main Council by the Council Chair, is charged with producing and managing the organization's annual operating budget.
- ◆ The Personnel Committee contends with issues dealing with the organization's staff, including reviewing the Personnel Policy handbook and Supervisors' Manual, as well as addressing staff grievances.
- ◆ Special Committees are commissioned on an ad-hoc basis as the need arises. Prominent committees currently include the Economic Development District (EDD) Governing Board that oversees the FRCOG CEDS Program (which is also managed by the FRCOG CEDS Committee); the Cooperative Public Health Service Oversight Board; the Franklin Regional Planning Board; and the Regional Brownfields Steering Committee.

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Enhanced committee structure based in some cases on citizen engagement.
- Implementation of shared purchasing system.
- Enhanced role for executive committee members focused on annual, short-term, and long-term strategic planning initiatives.
- Implementation of a formal introduction program for new members or other municipal representatives.
- Regular and direct communication on a regular basis between staff and member communities.
- Enhanced marketing and communication planning and initiatives.
- Enhanced role in structuring and organizing regional emergency management initiatives
- Implementation of fee for service initiatives.
- Enhanced community advocacy at the state level.

GREATER PORTLAND COUNCIL OF GOVERNMENTS

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Great Portland Council of Governments (GPCOG) formed in 1969 as a transportation and planning body and is currently made up of twenty-five local municipal members. With an annual budget of approximately \$2.5 million dollars in 2020 and approximately 25 staff members, the organization is funded primarily by member contributions, state and federal grants, and contracted services. As an organization, GPCOG primarily focuses on regional planning and economic development initiatives. GPCOG, among other services, assists member communities with development projects, provides them cost savings through its cooperative purchasing program, convenes diverse stakeholders to address issues of racial equity, and has been at the forefront of the regional efforts in tackling public health concerns surrounding the opioid epidemic, homelessness, and the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. GPCOG partners with the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS), a federal metropolitan/transportation planning organization.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

REGIONAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION

- ◆ GPCOG focuses on brownfield development projects specifically focused on hazardous/petroleum assessment projects.
- ◆ Some of the community planning tasks that the GPCOG helps local municipalities execute include master planning (with a focus on climate resiliency strategies in planning), grant writing, and planning research.
- ◆ GPCOG delivers fiscal savings (nearly \$366,000 in FY 2019) for its constituent members via cooperative purchasing, which encompasses the following: bulk copy paper/office supplies; crack sealing; culvert pipes; heating fuels; paving; road salt; road striping; signs; snowplow cutting edges, and transportation fuels.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- ◆ On matters pertaining to transportation planning and transit, GPCOG coordinates with the Portland Area Comprehensive Transportation System (PACTS) to best serve local members. PACTS is a federal metropolitan planning organization that coordinates transportation planning and investment decisions with the state, municipalities and public transportation partners. It directs the spending of more than \$25 million in transportation funding each year. Some PACTS-specific programs/capital projects include traffic signal management, reconstruction/rehabilitation of collector and arterial roads via funding through the Municipal Partnership Initiative (MPI) and other infrastructure enhancements for bridges and roadways.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

- ◆ One of the Greater Portland Council of Governments' (GPCOG) core responsibilities is the creation of a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.
- ◆ GPCOG has four primary loan offerings to help small businesses alleviate the impact of the pandemic. They include a microenterprise program, job program, rapid-response microloan program, and regional revolving loan program.

DATA ANALYTICS AND REPORTING

- ◆ GPCOG convenes webinars on how to promote and pursue racial equity in the region, and it showcases data on its website highlighting how COVID-19 is exacerbating racial disparities.
- ◆ GPCOG provides a variety of different data sources to the public. For instance, in its Data Library, GPCOG publishes a dashboard with statistics on the economic impacts of COVID-19, such as state and local government sales tax and fiscal budget projections, as well as municipal-level unemployment rates, PPP loan data, and COVID-19 new case and hospitalization trends. The organization also provides information for consultants/contractors/etc. on available bids and RFPs that have been issued. GPCOG's Data Library contains more granular data at the local level in the form of economic dashboards for each community, with data sourced from the US Census Bureau covering topics such as population and housing trends, general economic indicators, and data on transportation.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The governance structure of GPCOG is made up of two parts:

- ◆ General Assembly. The General Assembly convenes all of the region's 25 municipalities and serves as the policy-making body GPCOG. The General Assembly appoints officers, adopts the annual budget, sets dues, sets GPCOG bylaws, and generally guides the direction of the agency.
- ◆ An Executive Committee. The executive committee is composed of 9 to 11 of the member municipalities and Cumberland County. The executive committee implements and executes the policies that are approved by the General Assembly.

GPCOG is also made up of three committees: Metro Regional Coalition (MRC), Regional Voice Committee (RVC), and the Revolving Loan Committee.

- ◆ The MRC is a general-purpose committee that addresses policy/development issues that are particularly salient to the region. This committee is comprised of the Council Chair and Manager from the following communities in the GPCOG: Cape Elizabeth, Falmouth, Gorham, Portland, Scarborough, South Portland, and Westbrook.
- ◆ The RVS, made up of municipal leader-nominated volunteers, is tasked with undertaking and guiding the organization's outreach, engagement, and advocacy work with elected state and local policymakers.
- ◆ The Revolving Loan Committee determines what businesses qualify and receive funds from GPCOG's revolving fund.

- ◆ They focus on measuring success. Every year they put together a work plan built around grant funding they receive. They have 50-60 core-funded projects. For each one they produce outcomes and use those as management tools and set higher level of strategic plans.

KEY INTERVIEW FINDINGS

- ◆ GPCOG was once an organization that was not well known within the communities. They attributed this to them operating within their funding constraints, which didn't allow them to take on a lot of projects directly in communities. To remedy, they expanded their membership dues giving them more discretionary funding, added new staff to the team to expand capacity, and took on ad hoc and entrepreneurial projects that were also aligned with their overall strategic plan.
- ◆ GPCOG has taken a larger role in economic development in the region. Economic development was spearheaded because of growing awareness by the municipal membership that they were leaving a lot of things on the table (money, services, etc.).
- ◆ GPCOG has a great relationship with their MPO. They signed a memorandum of understanding with the MPO stating that they are aligned in their services and goals. They are now embedded in the legal structure of GPCOG, but still operate autonomously (since they are a federal organization).

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Enhanced discretionary fund profile.
- Pursuit of impactful, innovative projects.
- Direct participation in community-based projects.
- Enhanced role in regional economic development coordination.
- Enhanced committee structure.
- Formal resolution signaling shared focus on the MPO and COG.

THE CAPITAL DISTRICT REGIONAL PLANNING COMMISSION (NYS)

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

Formed in 1967 as the region's economic planning organization, the Capital District Regional Planning Commission (CDRPC) has been working on behalf of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady counties for over fifty years. With an annual budget of approximately \$1.1 million dollars in 2020 and approximately 10 staff members, the organization is funded primarily by member contributions and state and federal grants. In addition to providing analytical insights into the region's economic development and planning challenges and opportunities, CDRPC serves as the region's data and information center, foreign-trade zone administrator, and economic development district among other functions. In addition to providing these services, CDRPC also focuses on being a convener and supporter of cooperation among the public and private sectors, communicating pertinent information for the region's planners and spearheading efforts to tackle the region's most pressing economic development issues. CDRPC partners with the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), the area's federally designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), to understand and improve the relationship between regional development patterns and their effect on the transportation system.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

REGIONAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION

- ◆ CDRPC publishes land use reports, some of which are independently commissioned and other that were developed as part of the New Visions plan.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- CDRPC works jointly with staff from the Capital District Transportation Committee (CDTC), the area's federally-designated Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), to understand and improve the relationship between regional development patterns and their effect on the transportation system.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- ◆ CDRPC manages the region's Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS). The CDRPC's designation as an Economic Development District also helps the counties receive technical assistance from the EDA. The 10-county Foreign-Trade Zone also makes the region eligible for benefits on goods imports.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION PLANNING

- ◆ The organization also works with stakeholders across the region to support sustainability efforts and improvement in water quality issues.

EDUCATION AND YOUTH SERVICES

- ◆ CDRPC is the primary administrator of the region's youth detention center, the Capital District Juvenile Secure Detention Facility.

SUSTAINABILITY

- ◆ CDRPC helps local governments in the Capital Region deploy NYSEDA's Clean Energy Communities program to implement clean energy actions, save energy costs, create jobs, and improve the environment. In addition to providing tools, resources, and technical assistance, the program recognizes and rewards leadership for the completion of clean energy projects. Local governments can work alongside their local Clean Energy Community Coordinator to determine which four of the 10 High Impact Actions to implement to earn Clean Energy Community designation and qualify for grant funding.

DATA ANALYTICS AND REPORTING

- ◆ CDRPC publishes an array of interactive data dashboards on its website that covers a wide range of variables, including, but not limited to, the following: labor force data, inflation data, population and demographic trends data, property tax data, and data related to school and municipal government finances.
- ◆ The CDRPC provides a myriad of different data-related publications to the public. It publishes community fact sheets that contain socio-economic data, economic trends and location maps for each of the four counties and the communities within them down to the town/village level. The CDRPC also produces DataNews, a bi-monthly newsletter that compiles regional economic data and utilizes data visualization to highlight the forces driving economic trends in the region. It also provides a Capital Region Indicators Report, which primarily uses 5-year estimates of variables from the American Community Survey.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

COUNCIL/BOARD STRUCTURE

CDRPC is governed by the CDRPC Board, which is a 20-member body made up of five representatives elected from each of the four counties within the CDRPC's jurisdiction. CDRPC is mandated to be comprised of at least 51% of elected/appointed government officials.

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Enhanced annual strategic planning and reporting process that is utilized to communicate accomplishments, objectives, and articulate value to the communities served.
- Enhanced annual strategic planning process examining what was done, what will be done, how success is being measured, and what success looks like in the future.
- Focus on being known as a regional convener and honest broker by focusing on building trust and leveraging that trust to bring people and communities together around regional goals.

THOMAS JEFFERSON PLANNING DISTRICT COMMISSION

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATION

The Thomas Jefferson Planning District Commission (TJPDC) was created in July 1972 by the Virginia Area Development Act as the tenth planning district commission (PDC) out of the state's 23 total PDCs. The TJPDC consists of six constituent municipal members: the City of Charlottesville, as well as the governments of Albemarle, Fluvanna, Louisa, Greene, and Nelson Counties. With an annual budget of approximately \$2.0 million dollars in 2020 and approximately 11 staff members, the organization is funded primarily by member contributions, state and federal grants, contract services, other miscellaneous grants, and private foundations.

The organization's primary mission is to increase cooperation among local governments on issues of regional significance, including housing, transportation, environmental management and community planning and development. TJPDC also provides planning services to local communities in the region. TJPDC works alongside The Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the forum for cooperative transportation decision-making among Charlottesville, Albemarle, state and federal officials. The MPO considers long-range regional projects and combines public input, technical data, and agency collaboration to develop forward-thinking solutions

SUMMARY OF PROGRAMS AND SERVICES

REGIONAL PLANNING AND COORDINATION

- ◆ TJPDC works with communities on the development and facilitation of various area plans in the region.

TRANSPORTATION PLANNING

- ◆ TJPDC works alongside The Charlottesville-Albemarle Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO), the forum for cooperative transportation decision-making among Charlottesville, Albemarle, state and federal officials. The MPO considers long-range regional projects and combines public input, technical data, and agency collaboration to develop forward-thinking solutions. Organized for the City of Charlottesville and the urbanized area of Albemarle County immediately surrounding the City, the MPO is responsible for carrying out continuing, cooperative and comprehensive transportation planning and programming process. The MPO coordinates the transportation planning activities of the various transportation-related agencies that have both a direct and indirect impact on the Long-Range Plan and Transportation Improvement Program.
- ◆ TJPDC's Rural Transportation Program works on addressing the transportation and planning needs of rural governments in the five-county area. It also facilitates and coordinates transportation efforts and is involved in continuing the regional Rural Long Range Transportation Program.
- ◆ TJPDC's Bicycle and Pedestrian Coordination Committee is charged with focusing on matters of bike and pedestrian planning in the region.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PLANNING

- ◆ TJPDC acts as a facilitator and coordinator of comprehensive economic planning for the region, and as a convener of stakeholders and partnerships in the region.
- ◆ TJPDC's Regional Housing Partnership (RHP) is an advisory body that helps with pressing housing issues across the six jurisdictions. For example, it is involved in assisting with the state's Rent and Mortgage Relief Program for landlords and tenants seeking financial relief during the pandemic.
- ◆ The Regional Housing Partnership is also tasked with guiding the development of the Regional Housing Strategies Plan, which provides a holistic housing vision for the region and can be included in each jurisdiction's individual Comprehensive Plan.
- ◆ The Thomas Jefferson Regional Home Consortium, created in 1993, helps lower income communities in the region with their housing needs by serving as an entitlement Consortium for annual entitlement funding through HUD.

EMERGENCY PLANNING

- ◆ TJPDC works with officials from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Virginia Department of Emergency Management (VDEM), and local emergency managers to develop and maintain a regional Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan. These plans are updated every 5-years and provide details on how our communities can take action to prepare for natural disasters before they strike, thus reducing the potential for loss of life and property damage when disasters do occur. The hazard mitigation efforts are supported by the Hazard Mitigation Working Group.

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CONSERVATION PLANNING

- ◆ TJPDC is dedicated to restoring and preserving the health of the Chesapeake Bay Watershed and the region's waterways by assisting with executing on the Watershed Implementation Plan, which helps mid-Atlantic states and jurisdictions comply with the cleanup goals set out in 2010 in the EPA's Total Maximum Daily Load (TMDL).

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

- ◆ TJPDC helps to manage/mitigate risk from natural disasters in the region by working with FEMA, as well as state and local emergency managers, to create and update a Natural Hazard Mitigation Plan; efforts in this service area are overseen by the Hazard Mitigation Working Group of the TJPDC.

LEGISLATIVE SERVICES

- ◆ TJPDC's Legislative Services team relays important information to the local government elected officials and staff and seeks feedback on issues being considered during the General Assembly and study committee meetings. Such information then is shared with our state legislators. The team also advocates for locally requested legislation and budget items. With input from the region's local governing bodies,

a regional legislative program is developed and approved each year. During the General Assembly, an informational newsletter highlighting legislative activity is produced and distributed about every 7 – 10 days. This newsletter is prepared monthly throughout the remainder of the year. A final summary of legislative action also is developed following adjournment of the legislative session.

SUMMARY OF GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

TJPDC is overseen by a 12-member board of locally appointed officials. More specifically, the governing Commission is made up of two representatives from each of the six constituent member geographies, each selected by a local governing board in each jurisdiction (note: more than half of the local appointees are elected officials). The commissioners provide overall guidance and direction for the organization, and acts as the policy board for certain TJPDC programs.

TJPDC hosts a number of different committees to help the organization accomplish its objectives. They include:

- ◆ A regional transit partnership committee. Serving as an official advisory board, created by the City of Charlottesville, Albemarle County and in partnership with the Virginia Department of Rail and Public Transportation to provide recommendations to decision-makers on transit-related matters.
- ◆ A citizen transportation advisory committee. The Citizens Transportation Advisory Committee is the designated citizen’s committee of the MPO. This group reviews, comments, and recommends ideas on transportation plans, programs, studies and other appropriate documents. CTAC raises transportation issues and concerns from their communities. These recommendations go on to advise and aid the MPO Policy Board in their decision-making.

STRATEGY CONSIDERATIONS AND KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Focus on enhanced regional and statewide partnerships and collaboration.
- Enhanced legislative advocacy services.
- Enhanced citizen-based committee structure.
- Hosting of annual events and other get-togethers for regional partners and subject matter experts.

3. COUNCIL AND STAFF SURVEY SUMMARY

TOP CORE VALUES CITED

STAFF

1. Impactful
2. Outcome-Driven
3. Service-Oriented
4. Strategic
5. Collaborative

COUNCIL

1. Strategic
2. Outcome-Driven
3. Collaborative
4. Community Advocate
5. Service-Oriented

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS FOR WESTCOG AS AN ORGANIZATION

STAFF

- ◆ Provide high-priority solutions to problems best managed at a regional level (housing, transportation, and employment).
- ◆ Providing cost-saving services for member municipalities.
- ◆ A regional hub for planning and collaboration for towns that can inform the chief decision-makers with impactful (and easy to understand) reports and data.
- ◆ Implementing a series of effective projects that have notable, real results.
- ◆ Knowledgeable trusted advisor.

COUNCIL

- ◆ Collaborating to find creative solutions to regional issues.
- ◆ Action, completed projects, advocacy.
- ◆ Ability to assist members in making their cities and towns better, more complete communities.

- ◆ Innovative and effective in meeting the needs of the region.
- ◆ An organization that shapes the Western region of CT to successfully respond to challenges of the 21st century.

FUTURE EXPECTATIONS FOR THE WESTCOG REGION

STAFF

- ◆ Having a mix of urban, suburban, and rural environments that meets the needs/wants of a diverse population.
- ◆ Being a role model to New England in advocacy for sustainable and equitable development emphasizing public transit and active transportation.
- ◆ Economic development, advanced transportation options, high quality of living, affordable housing, and integration/inclusion.
- ◆ Known as a livable area that has a variety of choices in housing, recreation and well-paying jobs for all persons no matter their life stage, income or race.

COUNCIL

- ◆ Providing excellent education in addition to safe, affordable communities.
- ◆ Well managed, economically vibrant and a collection of diverse communities that are great places to live and work.
- ◆ The leader in the state for innovation and economic development.
- ◆ Great place to live, work and play.
- ◆ Great place to live, ample job opportunities and a complete place that has few drawbacks to living there.

TOP PRIORITIES AND SERVICES IN THE FUTURE

STAFF

1. Transportation
2. Researching and coordinating new regional shared services initiatives
3. Economic development planning and coordination
4. Conservation and environmental resource planning
5. Local or State advocacy for WestCOG member projects

COUNCIL

1. Fiber and broadband implementation
2. Economic development planning and coordination
3. Identifying and communicating grant opportunities for member communities
4. Local or State advocacy for WestCOG member projects
5. Transportation

TOP PERCEIVED CHALLENGES FOR THE ORGANIZATION MOVING FORWARD

STAFF

1. Variability in state and federal revenues
2. Identifying and promoting buy-in for regional service projects
3. Coordinating large regional projects with a diverse group of member communities.

COUNCIL

1. Coordinating large regional projects with a diverse group of member communities
2. Fiscal constraints limiting capacity to take on more programs and services
3. Variability in state and federal revenues





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