



POWERING REGIONAL COLLABORATION AND EQUITY

HUD'S SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES INITIATIVE

By Karen Chapple, Elizabeth Mattiuzzi, and Meghan Gough



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Acknowledgments

This research was supported by grants from the Surdna and Ford Foundations. Thanks go to the students of Prof. Chapple's spring 2016 research studio at UC Berkeley for participating in survey development and to Kristine Williams at UC Berkeley for assistance with contacting respondents.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Sustainable Communities Initiative Regional Planning Grant (SCI-RPG), a competitive grant, supported collaborations among diverse players in metropolitan regions to plan for livability, awarding \$165 million to 74 metropolitan regions. This report presents findings about the program based on a survey of grantees (mostly metropolitan planning organizations or other regional agencies) with a high response rate (76%).

Overall, impacts of the grant program included new relationships, better community engagement strategies, new datasets and tools, regional plans that incorporate the three Es (environment, equity, and economy), and new projects jumpstarted. But the most significant impact of the program was in spurring new partnerships, cited by two-thirds of grantees. The partnerships formed cut across sectors and built trust, and most relationships have carried on beyond the grant period, whether they are now focused on implementation or other planning efforts. Grantees were most likely to partner with universities, local governments, and single-issue interest groups. Almost all improved their relationships with local governments as a result of the grant.

Many regions expanded their awareness of regional equity issues as a result of the grant, specifically by adopting new metrics to track distributive issues and reaching out to under-served populations. According to about half of grantees, the two most important equity impacts were increasing the focus of existing policies or programs on affordable housing, jobs, or transportation, and increasing the awareness of social equity needs among the public and leaders.

The SCI-RPG strengthened the leadership of regional agencies: many regional agencies gained new credibility based on the inclusiveness of their SCI planning processes and the results that they showed with demonstration projects. In many regions, partners are working together on implementing the plan they developed with the program and are applying for funding to implement the plan. Most grantees report that one or more new collaborations had arisen between players in their region with a specific focus on implementing the regional plan, and almost half of grantees have applied for further funds specifically to implement their regional sustainability plans. The majority of grantees report that the program has led to moderate to transformative new investment, programs, and policies, and most expect these to grow in the coming years.

However, challenges remain. Some regions failed to engage municipalities in their efforts, and see them now as necessary for implementation. Funding for implementation is scarce. Some regions still lack local data and even agreed-upon definitions of “equity.”

Still, this survey shows that most grantees agree that the SCI-RPG program was a unique and successful experiment in using federal assistance to power collaboration and equity for regional sustainability planning.

PLANNING SUSTAINABLE REGIONS WITH THE HUD SCI-RPG

The livability of a region does not fit neatly under one heading. Issues such as economic competitiveness, environmental sustainability, inclusiveness, and affordability cut across policy silos and jurisdictional boundaries. Yet all too often, the people, organizations, and government entities that have the ability to work together to use resources more efficiently and improve the vitality of their regions only see their small geography or their slice of the pie, and overlook the inherent benefit of collaboration.

In 2009, the Secretaries of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Transportation (DOT) formed the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (Partnership) to create a more efficient and effective federal presence in metropolitan regions. The Partnership's Livability Principles encompassed economic sustainability and growth; social equity and the inclusion of traditionally-marginalized groups in governance and the economy; environmental sustainability; and the convergence of these three areas through investment in location-efficient land use, transportation, and housing development. The Partnership spurred several new programs, including a one-of-a-kind regional planning grant.¹

The Sustainable Communities Initiative Regional Planning Grant (SCI-RPG), a competitive grant, supported collaborations among diverse players in metropolitan regions to plan for livability. It was a unique experiment that used federal assistance to encourage comprehensive planning at the regional level.² Federal funding that reaches urban areas is typically formula- and/or place-based, or is allocated to specific programs by state bureaucracies. SCI-RPG specifically worked to overcome the traditional divisions (and competition) between local jurisdictions by encouraging regional leadership and diverse partners—from business and universities to foundations to community groups—to develop and implement a shared vision for their region.³

The SCI Regional Planning Grant

(SCI-RPG) awarded \$165 million to 74 metropolitan regions across the US for regional planning. It also funded \$10 million worth of capacity building and technical assistance by national nonprofits in regions.

Our team surveyed grant consortium leaders in the 74 regions that received an SCI Regional Planning Grant in order to understand how the process of preparing a regional plan affected how different partners in regions work together and how they incorporate social equity into planning. We also wanted to know whether the work that regional partners started under SCI is continuing (See Appendix: Methodology). Altogether, 56 of the 74 grantees responded to the survey, for a 76% response rate.

This research asked:

- How did the SCI-RPG **catalyze** collaborative planning that promotes livability and sustainability in regions?
- How are the original consortium partners or other players **implementing** the regional plans?
- How did the SCI-RPG change the way cities and regions engage with and plan for social **equity**?
- How did the SCI-RPG change the way regional agencies engage with **communities**?



Why sustainable regions? Why equitable regions?

The SCI-RPG tested the idea that federal funding for regional planning could encourage different interests to find common purpose, and build sustainable, equitable regions.

A regional sustainability plan might have as its starting point a specific issue such as improving schools, helping seniors age in place, or increasing health or quality of life through access to green spaces. Grantees chose what areas to focus on in their planning process, while keeping the Livability Principles in mind, and then used the regional planning process to bring together diverse partners.

A *sustainable* region can weather economic storms and grow without losing its character or damaging its environmental resources. Strategies for growing a sustainable region might include growing and retaining a workforce that matches available jobs, capitalizing on economic strengths and local institutions to grow and retain jobs that cannot easily be moved elsewhere, and addressing the affordability of transportation and housing for workers. These approaches all go hand in hand with improving social equity.

Planning for social and economic *equity* means reducing barriers to opportunity for different socioeconomic and racial and ethnic groups. It can include investing in schools, housing, transit, workforce training, economic development, and services for seniors—in other words, the same things that make the region livable for everyone. This approach recognizes that a region cannot be sustainable in terms of its workforce, quality of life, and growth, if it leaves behind certain groups.

Reducing racial and class disparities in employment, affordability of transit and housing, and access to services and quality education benefits the entire regional economy, and regions with less extreme income inequality tend to weather economic storms better.⁴ Having a common purpose, and a reason to collaborate, can bring together actors with different interests to address disparities.

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACTS

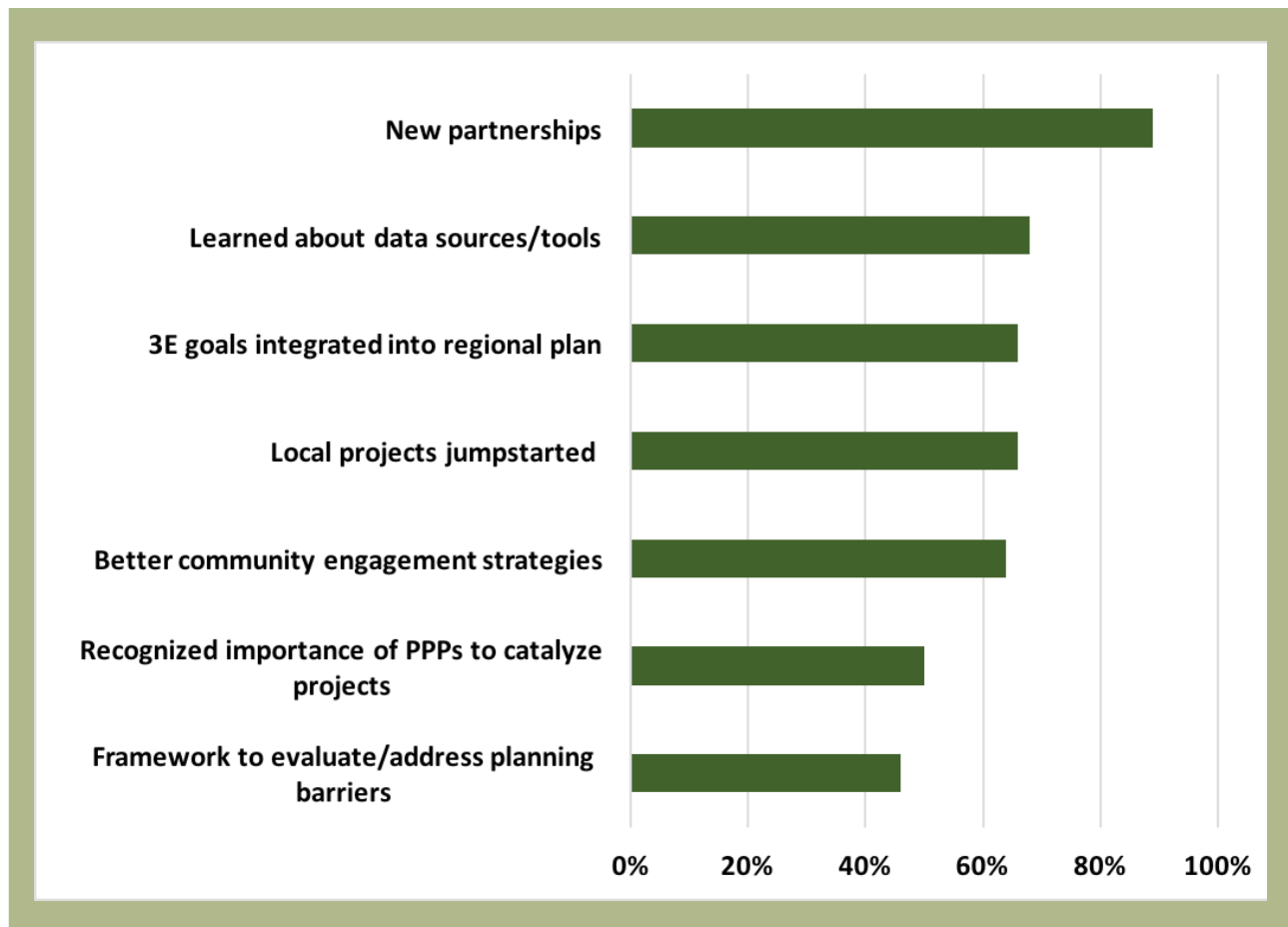
“The organization has integrated the community engagement strategies used during the SCI planning program into its standard processes.”

Changing how regions work

Grantees generally agree that the SCI grant had transformative impacts. New partnerships and increased access to sources of regional data and tools for collecting and using them were the most frequently cited outcomes of the interactions generated through the regional planning process (Figure 1). Partnerships and improved community engagement rose to the top as the most important impact of improved relationships through the SCI-RPG process (Figure 2). New partnerships also focused on integrating equity into planning, for instance by preparing a Fair Housing and Equity Assessment (FHEA), a condition of the SCI grant that will help prepare

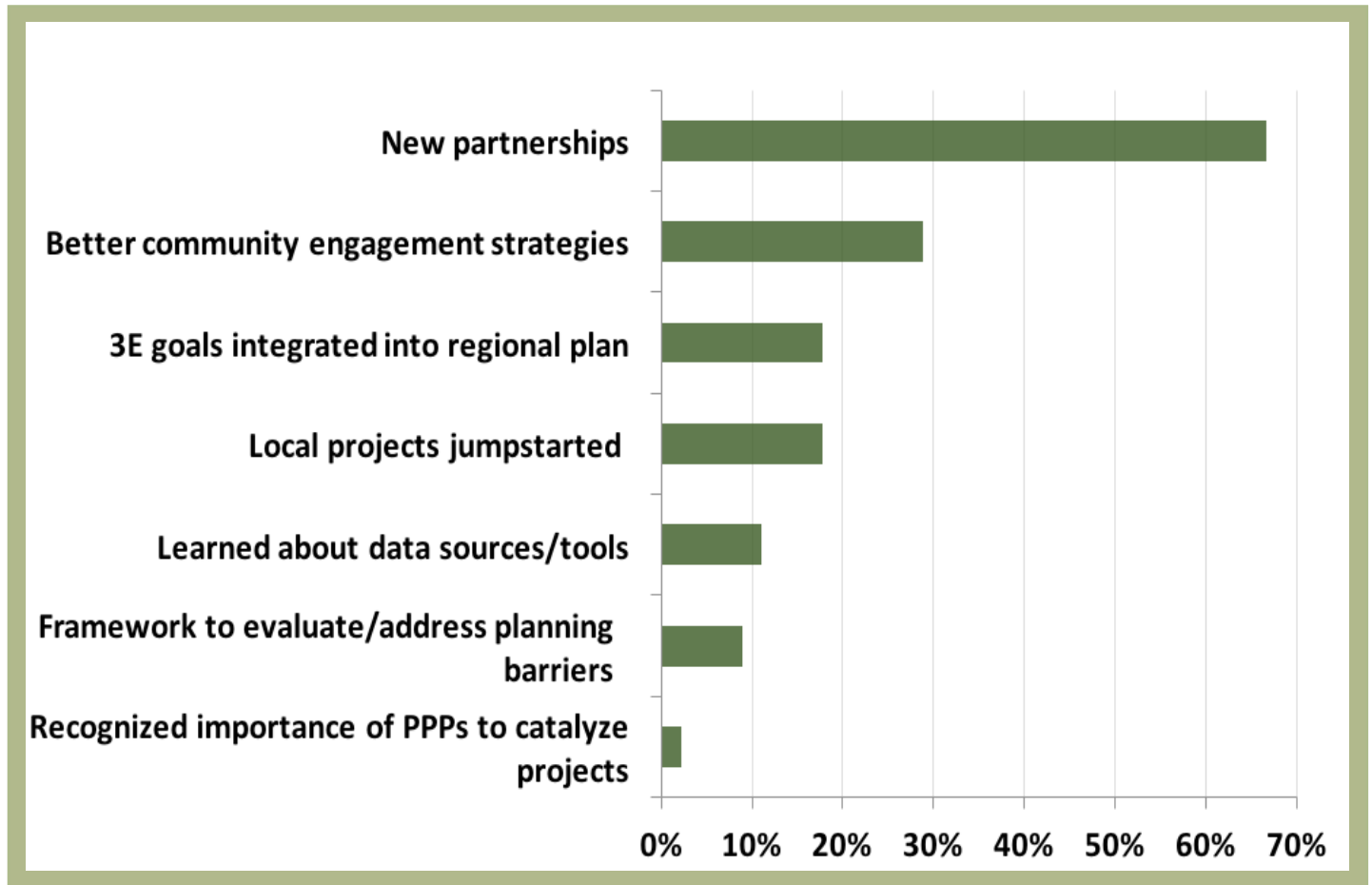
regions to meet HUD’s new Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH) rule.

Figure 1: Impacts of the SCI Planning Process



Question 1: N=56. “Please reflect on the SCI planning program and the overarching impacts this process had on your region. Check all that apply.”

Figure 2: Relative Significance of Impacts of the SCI Planning Process



Question 2: N=45. "Of the impacts listed above, which were most significant for your organization?"

The following sections describe impacts on relationships and equity, as well as how the implementation of plans and projects has progressed.

Impacts on Relationships Across Sectors and Jurisdictions in Regions

Spurring new – and durable – collaborations

HUD designed the SCI-RPG so that each consortium would include at least one regional agency, a region's principal city or county, and jurisdictions representing at least half of the region's population (to diminish the dominance of central cities).⁵ They also had to have a nonprofit or university partner. As a result, grantees began new partnerships with other health, economic development, and private sector organizations, in addition to the mix of required consortium members (Table 1).

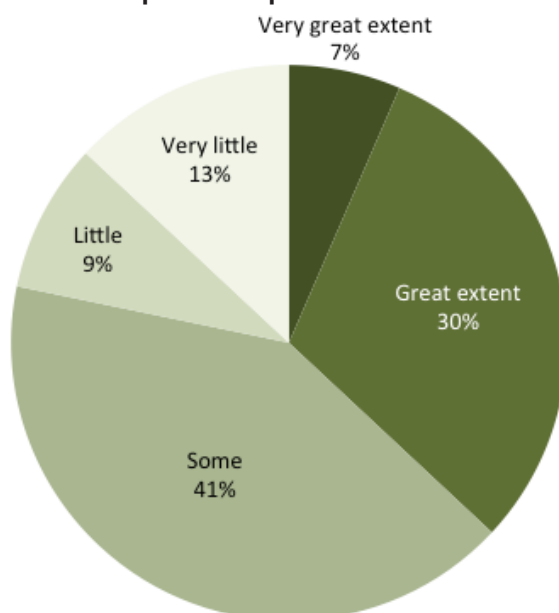
Table 1: Types of organizations with which consortium leaders formed new partnerships.

Partner type	Share of grantees with new partnerships
University	54%
Local government	43%
Single-issue interest groups	41%
Affordable housing developer	36%
Private sector	36%
Hospital/health organization	34%
Community foundation	32%
Community development corporation	29%
Workforce development organization	29%
State/regional government	4%

Question 6: N=56. *“With which of the following organizations have you formed new partnerships as a result of the SCI process? Check all that apply.”*

Partnerships formed through the SCI process have continued, although they have evolved from the regular meetings during the grant period. Most grantees report that the relationships that their organization had forged during the SCI planning process had continued beyond the grant period (Figure 3).⁶ The most frequently mentioned topics of continued collaboration were on economic development, grant-writing for plan implementation and other topics.⁷

Figure 3: Degree to which relationships have persisted



Question 9: N= 46. *“To what extent has your relationship (communication, partnerships, initiatives) with SCI consortium members persisted after the completion of the SCI planning process?”*

Building trust and busting silos

The collaborative nature of the SCI-RPG gave regional bodies, whether an MPO, a planning district, a COG, or a county, a chance to lead and build credibility and trust within their region. One MPO increased its membership from roughly half to nearly all local jurisdictions after the SCI-RPG. Another said that “The relevance that we have demonstrated, thanks to the HUD grant, helped us to make the case that our regional organization does provide value locally.”

The new partnerships that local governments formed during the process of developing the regional sustainability plan cut across scales of government and policy “silos”⁸. Often a regional agency will only interact with a particular local department that corresponds to their mission, such as planning or economic development. Said one regional planner, “...in the past, relationships were with other [local] planning staff, now they are with transportation, emergency services, housing, parks, and health staff.”

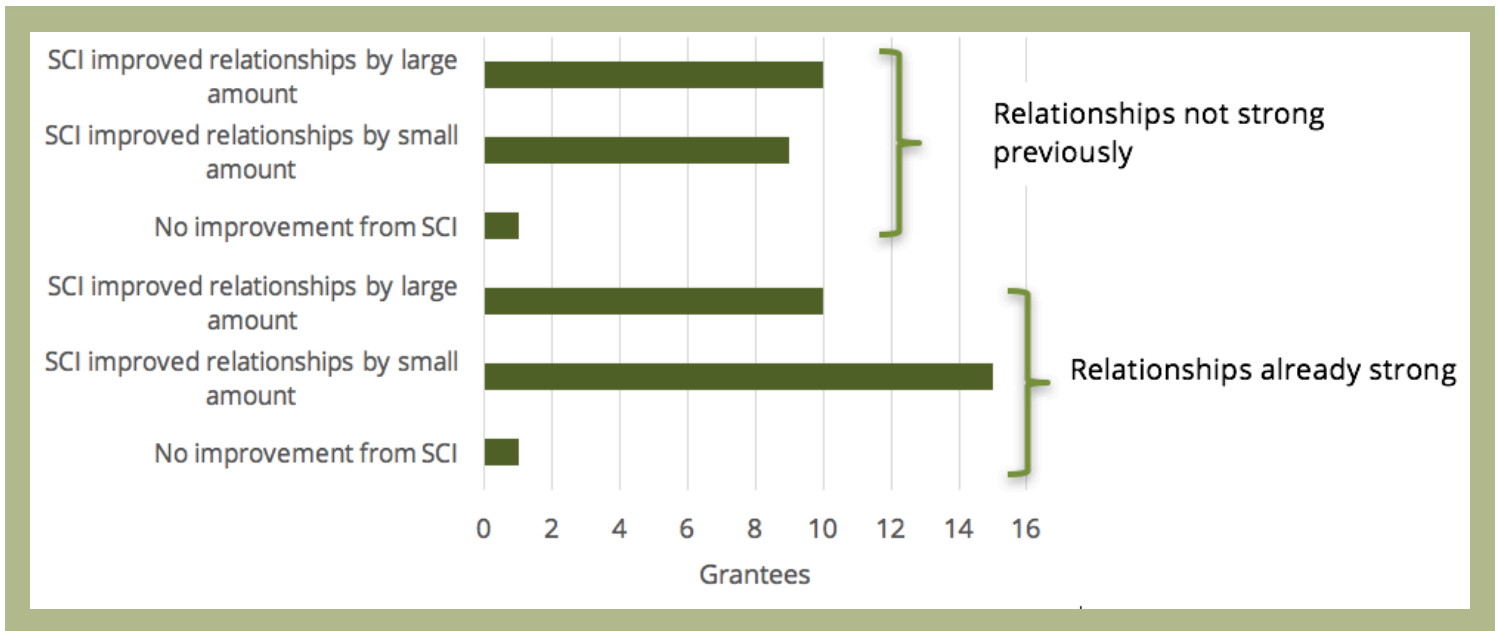


Improving relationships with local governments

Most grantees responding to the survey (96%), representing metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) or other regional agencies, said that their organization’s relationships with local governments have improved as a result of the SCI planning process (Figure 3). Where there were negative impacts on relationships, this typically occurred due to the failure to include potential partners, such as suburban municipalities. As one grantee explained, “Arguably, the consortium may have had a chilling effect on relationships with counties who were not represented on the consortium.”

“We were a fairly quiet council of governments prior to the SCI experience. We have used new partnerships in housing and workforce development to move forward regional projects in both those areas.”

Figure 3: Improvement of relationships



Question 4: N= 46. *"To what extent have relationships (communication, partnerships, initiatives) with local governments (e.g., cities, counties and townships) in your region improved as a result of the SCI process?"*

When asked to give an example of what these changes in relationships with local governments consisted of, grantees focused on collaboration. According to one: "We now have standing regional committees of fair housing professionals and workforce development directors." Said another: "Celebrating the successes of this project made us more visible to municipalities that may not have been familiar with our work. As a result they have contacted us more regularly for assistance in other areas."

A quarter of grantees cited progress on specific projects, in addition to general improvements in relationships across municipalities. For example: "We already had a good relationship with our county administrator and mayor at the time we received the grant. An example of how that improved was our joint effort to work closely with the county to write a grant together that the county Sheriff's Department received to create a community plan to address high crime."

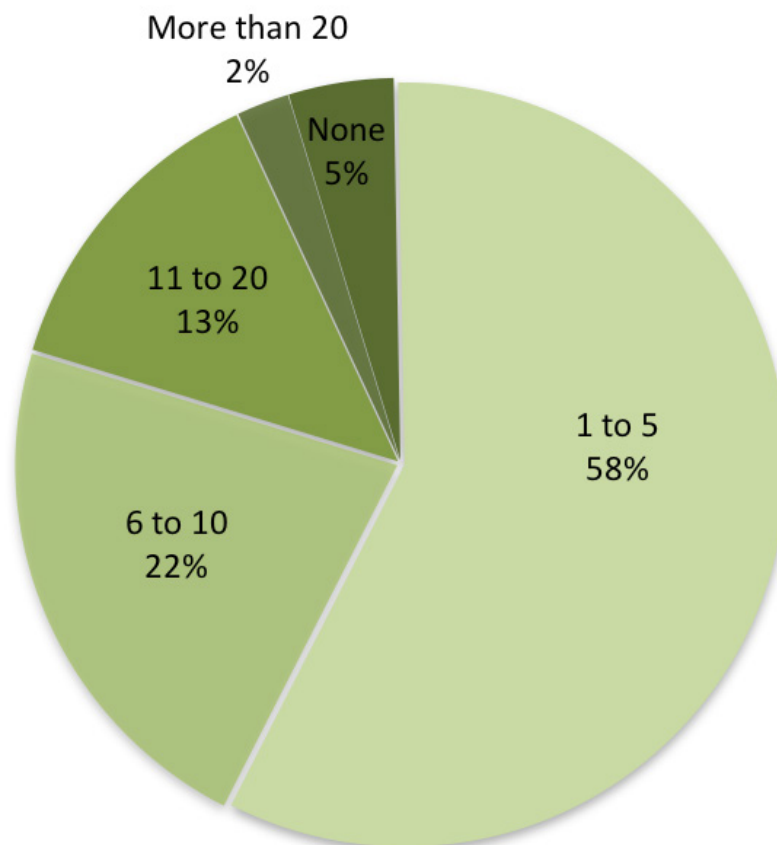


Implementing plans collaboratively

Consortium members are finding new ways to work together on their regional sustainability goals. 95 percent of grantees report that one or more new collaborations had arisen between players in their region with a specific focus on implementing the regional plan (Figure 5). Over a third report more than five such new partnerships. One regional official said that “We have new relationships specifically focused on equitable infill development improving health in our disadvantaged communities.” Others noted new collaborations focusing on economic development, environmental quality, housing, transportation, and neighborhood revitalization.

“The extensive and intense public involvement and partnerships established have begun to make true functional and voluntary cooperation a reality in our region.”

Figure 5: Number of new collaborations focused on plan implementation



Question 7: N= 45. “Approximately how many new collaborations focused on regional plan implementation has your organization established as a result of relationships you made through the SCI Program?”

Applying for more funding

46 percent of grantees said their organization had applied for further funds specifically to implement their regional sustainability plans, and another 12 percent had applied for other sustainability grants. This confirms other research that has shown that grantees were disproportionately successful at leveraging transportation grants from the U.S. Department of Transportation.⁹

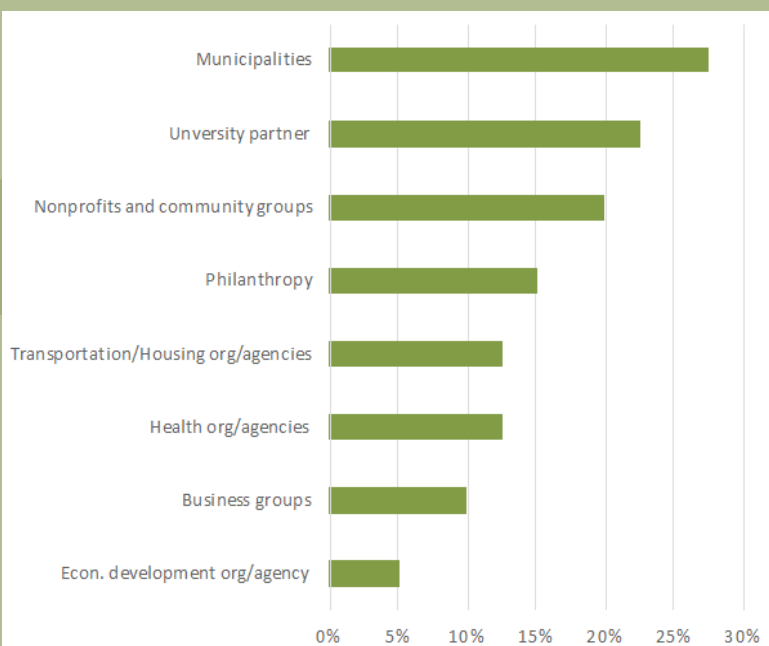
"We had numerous partnerships develop which went on to new projects, such as a planning grant from the Department of Justice to address high crime issues through community involvement, and a successful Artplace grant that created a new Crossroads Cultural Art Center."

Several grantees report that grant-making has occurred within the region in support of implementing their regional sustainability plan. The source of the funding was either the MPO or consortium partners, including philanthropic organizations and community foundations. This grant-making is an example of ongoing relationships generated in their region through the SCI planning process.

Including some – but not all

Figure 6 shows the types of organizations that were not at the table for implementation but could be an asset to implementation. Municipalities were the most frequently cited potential partners that were not currently involved in regional sustainability efforts. This is likely in part due to the large number of jurisdictions relative to other partners, and because some jurisdictions were wary of the original regional planning efforts.¹⁰ However, it is surprising that academic, community, and philanthropic groups were in some cases still not involved in implementation activities, given HUD's intention that these sectors serve as key partners in the grant consortia. Perhaps the consortium leaders who responded to the survey only now have a sense of where they need to work across sectors and policy silos to incorporate transportation, health, and economic development agencies, as well as the private sector. This gap could be a cause for concern regarding implementation or a sign that the SCI-RPG raised awareness of gaps in regional collaboration.

Figure 6: Gaps in partnerships for implementation



Question 12: N= 40. *"Please list 3-5 (or more) organizations that might be able to contribute to discussions related to implementation of your regional plan but are currently not."*

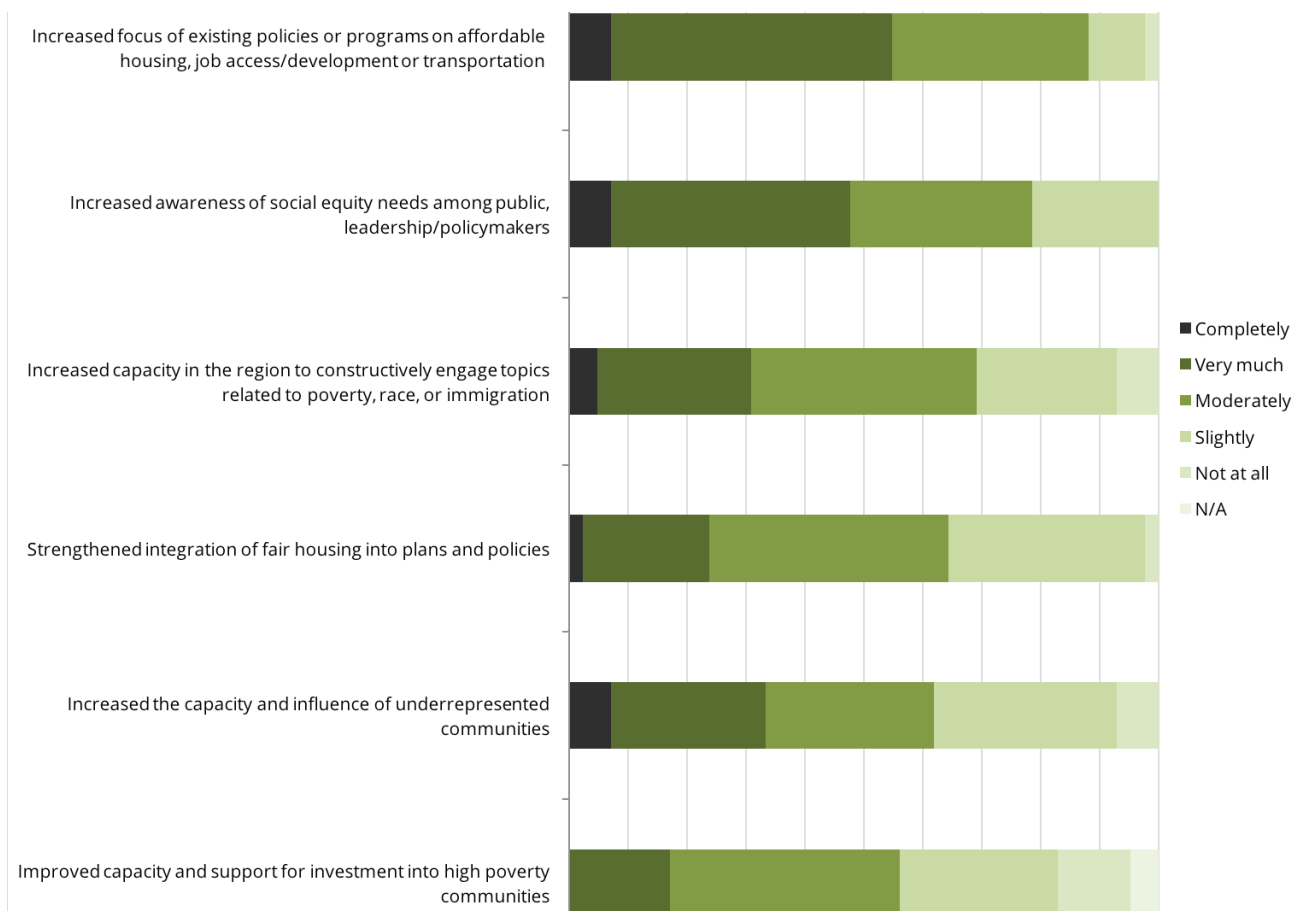
Impacts on Equity and Community Engagement

Expanding regional equity

Through the grants, regions became more familiar with local equity issues. Figure 7 shows that the biggest impact of the SCI-RPG planning process was to increase the focus of existing policies or programs on affordable housing, jobs, or transportation (55%). The next highest ranked equity impact was increasing the awareness of social equity needs among the public and leaders (48%). As one grantee reported, conducting community engagement “gave confidence to elected officials that the plan was truly community driven.” The grant also increased capacity and influence of underrepresented communities (33%): for example, “The public outreach that occurred from the plan has stimulated the public to engage other public entities within the region on individual projects.” The SCI-RPG gave regional leaders an opportunity to incorporate equity into existing policies and programs and raise awareness of disparities and where they hold the region back from growing and being self-sustaining.

“And the language of the plan is targeted at people of all ages, incomes and abilities - which reflects a mega-shift in the thinking of our member jurisdictions.”

Figure 7: SCI impact on equity in planning in grantee regions



Question 16. N= 42. “How, if at all, did the SCI planning process strengthen analysis and integration of social equity concerns in the planning process?”

Using data to help regional leaders understand social equity¹¹

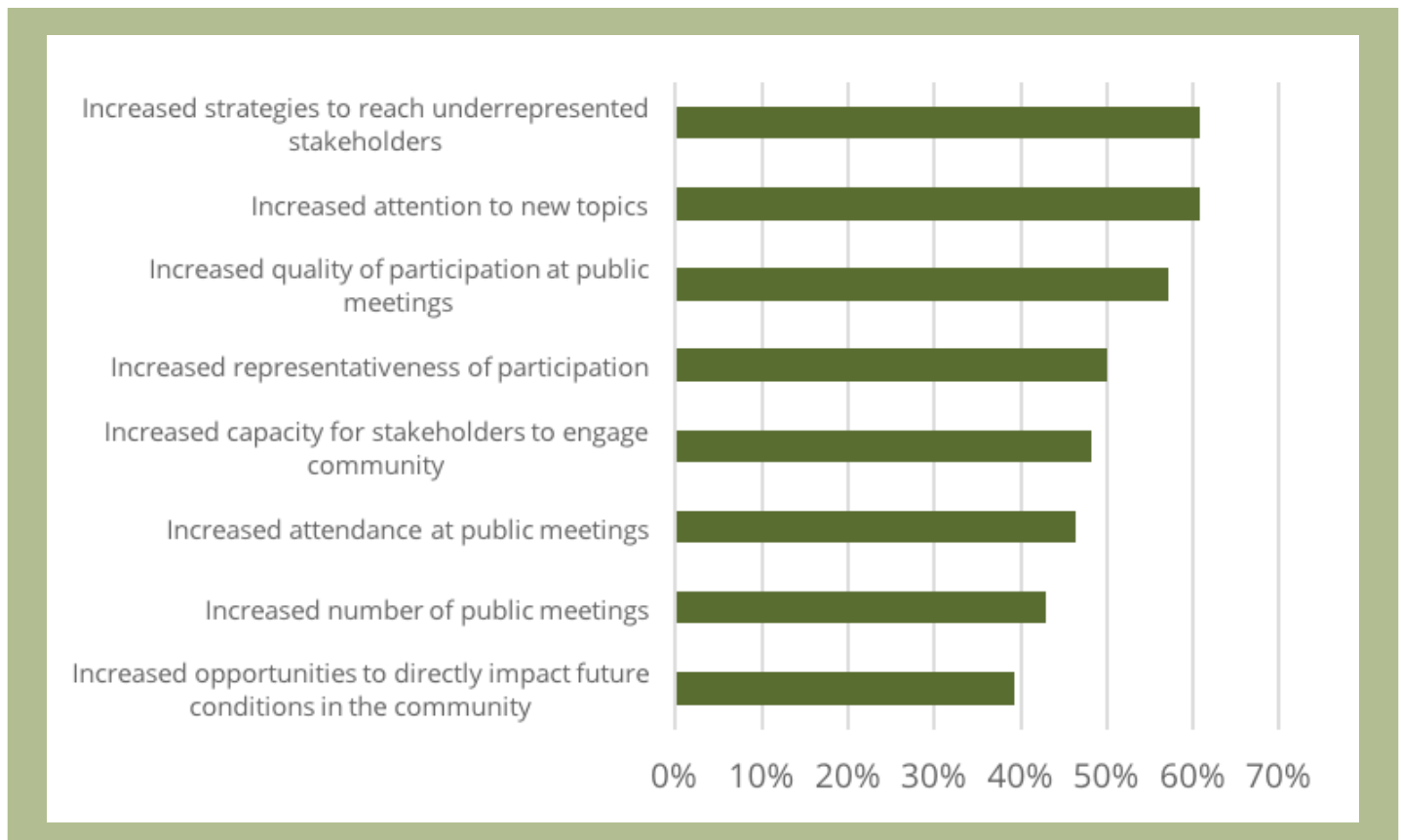
One grantee noted that “we focused a lot of our discussion on the transportation needs of workers and their struggles to use transit to get to jobs outside the City. Our state transit agency is currently redesigning our bus system and has adopted many of our talking and data points.” Another said that “the MPO has adopted/retooled several programs to improve access to work opportunities through transportation policy and investment.” A few grantees said that measuring access to opportunity had become a standard part of the way their MPO prepares its regional transportation plan (RTP).

The HUD Location Affordability Portal and new local data collection both provided new information to regions on disparities, quality of life, and the economic health of the region. The SCI-RPG required regions to prepare a fair housing assessment, raising awareness of equity issues related to housing. Collecting their own data empowered some municipalities that typically rely on outside data sources.¹²

Finding new ways to reach and empower underrepresented stakeholders

Grantees report using the grant resources to engage the public in a variety of ways, such as increasing the quality of participation at public meetings and expanding the diversity of participants and topics covered at those meetings (Figure 8).

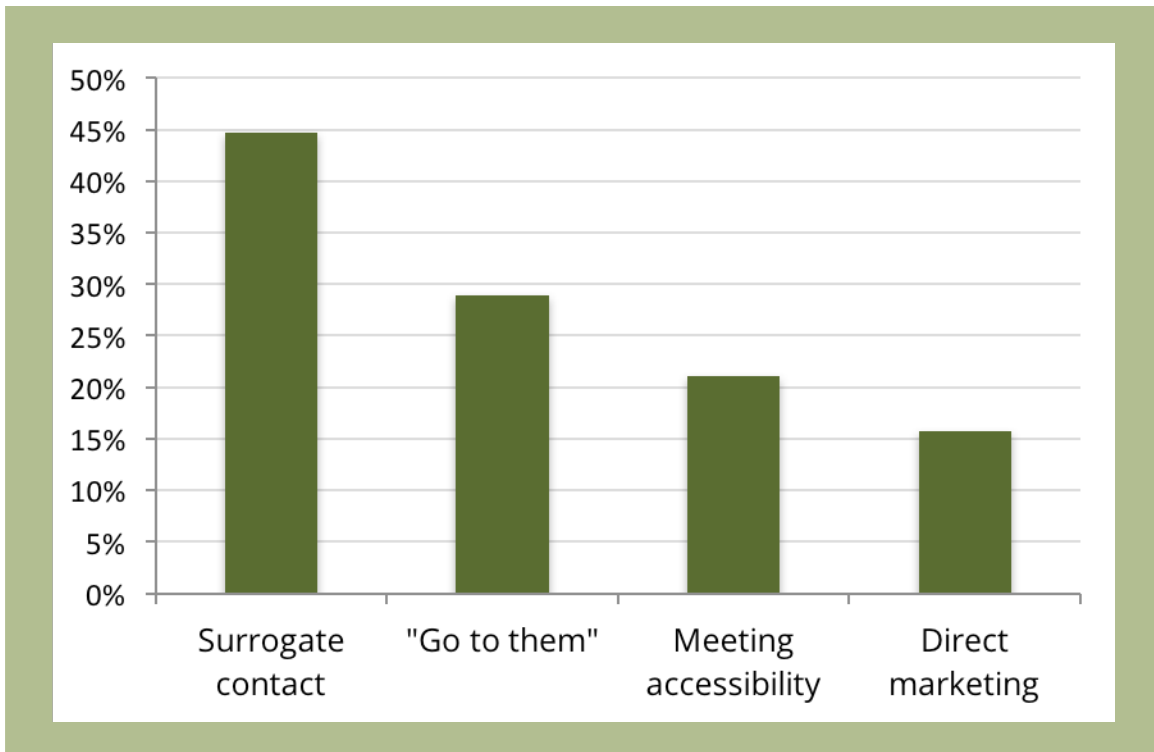
Figure 8: Impacts of engagement strategies



Question 13. N= 56. “Which were the most significant impacts of the community engagement strategies that you employed during the SCI planning process? (Check all that apply).”

Figure 9 shows new strategies reported by grantees for increasing engagement by underrepresented communities in SCI planning. A common theme was working with partners that already had a level of familiarity with communities. Forty-five percent of respondents said that they used the SCI grant to fund engagement work by organizations such as a faith organization, a food bank, or community group. Other strategies included holding meetings in the evenings, providing translation services and food, attending regularly scheduled meetings held by community groups, or holding meetings in a community setting.

Figure 9: Strategies for increasing participation by underrepresented groups



Question 15. N= 38. *"What Strategies did you find most effective at specifically increasing participation of underrepresented populations in the SCI planning process?"* Our team organized responses into categories.

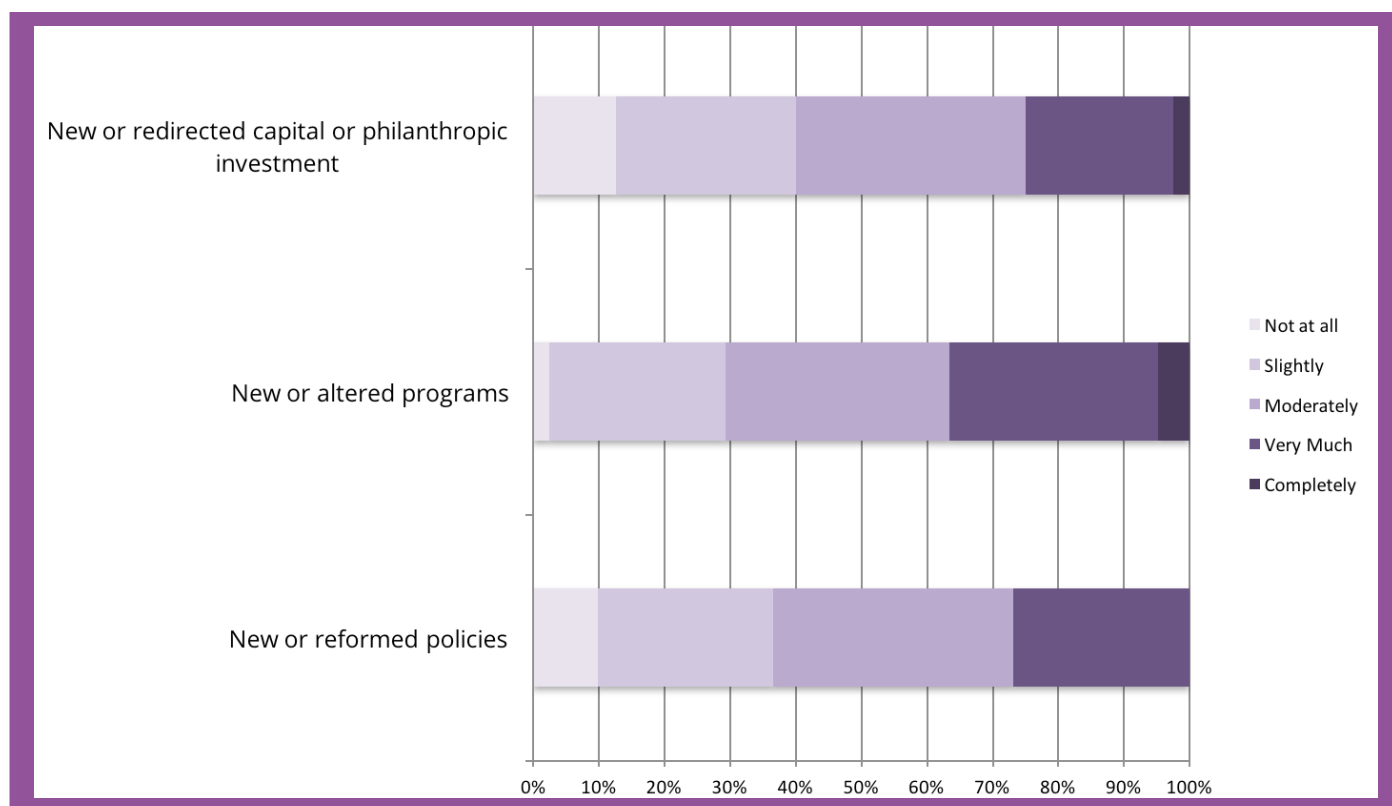


IMPLEMENTATION OF REGIONAL SUSTAINABILITY PLANS

Implementing the plans

Most grantees report that their regional sustainability plan has led to some level of change in policies, programs, and capital or philanthropic investment in their region (Figure 10). Figure 11 shows that planners expect the impacts of the SCI-RPG to increase in the next five years, as compared to its impact since the end of the grant period. Examples of implementation focused on land use policies, economic development, and leveraging other sources of funding.¹³

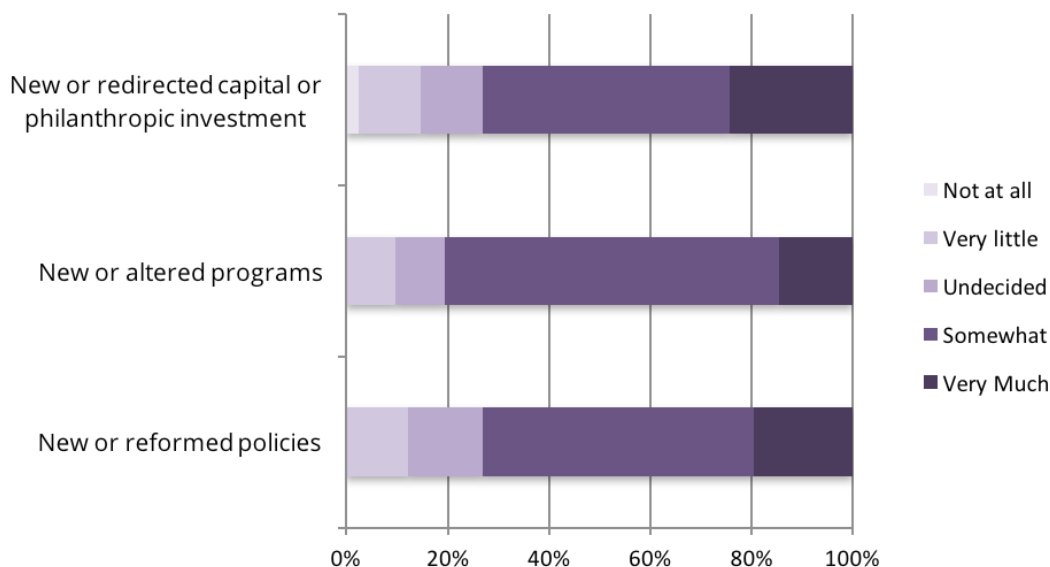
Figure 10: Impact Since the End of the Grant Period



Question 19: N=41. "Since the end of the SCI Grant, to what degree has the regional planning for sustainable development impacted policy, programming, or investments?"



Figure 11: Expected Impact of SCI-RPG Planning In the Next Five Years



Question 20: N=41. *"In the next five years, to what degree do you anticipate that your regional plan for sustainable development will impact the following planning issues?"*

Zoning, TOD, affordable housing, and workforce development came up as examples of policies, programs, or investments for implementing the regional sustainability plan. One region is considering "...increasing the production and preservation of affordable housing near transit, [to] mitigate displacement risk for low-income households and small businesses, create mixed-income communities, and grow middle-wage jobs."

Housing strategies also came out of regional sustainability plans. One region's SCI-RPG planning included work on "...TOD station area plans that municipalities have passed [and] updated zoning ordinances, and now are seeing new mixed-income, mixed-use development projects being built." Another grantee said their regional agency has "...just undertaken a HUD funded pilot program to develop a regional project-based voucher program. All the housing authorities in the region are involved."

"The redesign of our bus network will be influenced by our discussion of job sprawl and the challenges transit dependent workers face."

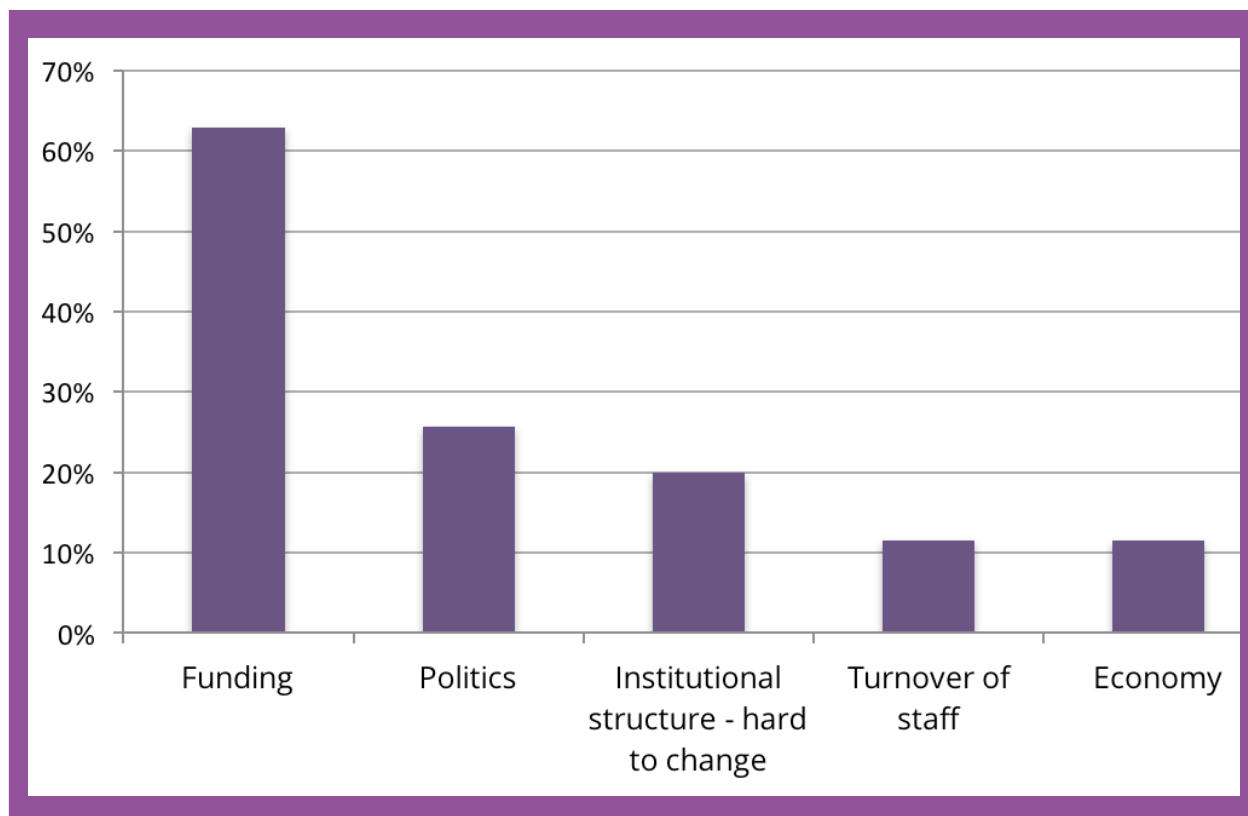
Economic development is part of regional plan implementation. One region is now undertaking workforce development and training for the "renewable energy economy." Another region reported that "The regional economic development council has launched new programs related to promoting the region, workforce development, rural economic development, and startup ecosystems." In another region, a municipal broadband service recommended in the plan had gone live.



Identifying remaining challenges for implementation

The most frequently-mentioned barrier to implementation is lack of funding, e.g. for staff, capital projects, or building capacity at partner organizations (Figure 12). Other major challenges include political obstacles, such as turnover of elected officials or general lack of buy-in, and the difficulty of changing existing institutions.

Figure 12: Barriers to Implementing Regional Plans



Question 23: N=35. "What do you see as the continuing challenges to implementation of your regional plan for sustainable development?"

MOVING FORWARD

This survey provides the first evidence that the SCI-RPG program successfully supported regional collaborations for equitable regional planning. The program's most lasting impacts are in spurring new relationships and changing how regions conduct their planning process to incorporate more stakeholders and new forms of data. In many regions, social equity has entered the regional planning conversation for the first time because of the grant.

The grant has spurred new planning processes and equity metrics, and has resulted in many new projects on the ground. Via the program, participants began to collaborate across sectors, in some cases busting "silos" and reaching new consensus about how to create a more livable region. Full implementation awaits both more funding and buy-in from even more stakeholders, particularly local governments. Still, this survey shows that most grantees agree that the SCI-RPG program was a unique and successful experiment in using federal assistance to power collaboration and equity for regional sustainability planning.



Berkeley



NOTES AND APPENDICES

APPENDIX: Survey Design and Methodology

The survey asked about regional grant consortium leaders' experience forming and sustaining partnerships across sectors to develop and implement a regional plan. It asked what strategies their organization used to engage underrepresented populations, and the impact their SCI planning activities have had on social equity in the region.

56 out of 74 regions responded to the survey (76 percent response rate), which was conducted in summer 2016. Our team made multiple attempts to reach consortium leaders by email and phone. The lead organization on the grant was typically an MPO, COG, or economic development agency. A handful of the respondents represented nonprofit organizations or academic institutions that played a lead role in their region's SCI regional planning grant. The responses represent the perceptions of staff at a regional planning body or another organization that represents regional interests.

The survey asked closed-ended questions coupled with open-ended questions in order to elicit more detailed responses. Some of the open-ended responses fell into categories that our team coded, while others captured general feedback. This feedback provides insights that represent the next best thing to interviewing all of the consortium leads.

NOTES:

1. SCI consisted of two planning grants that supported the livability principles: the Community Challenge Planning Grant (also place-based), and the Regional Planning Grant.
2. Karen Chapple, *Planning Sustainable Cities and Regions: Towards More Equitable Development* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2015).
3. A typical regional grantee "consortium" had a Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) or a Council of Governments (COG) leading it and included cities, counties, business leaders, university partners, and others with a role to play in building a strong region. Each consortium, or group of institutions and organizations, developed a regional sustainability plan and distributed smaller grants in their region. These subgrants supported "capacity building" by community-based organizations (CBOs) and their members to help them become more involved in regional planning. The policies and processes that govern regions, particularly land use and transportation, are complex, requiring training and funding for nontraditional individuals and organizations to grow their capacity to participate in planning. In addition to developing a plan and working to expand public and cross-sector participation, HUD asked grantee regions to analyze data on poverty and access to housing in their region. This assessment was called a Fair Housing and Equity Assessment, and it served as a trial run for the then-forthcoming HUD rule on Affirmatively Furthering Fair Housing (AFFH), which went into effect in 2016.
4. Chris Benner, and Manuel Pastor, *Equity, Growth, and Community: What the Nation Can Learn from America's Metro Areas* (California: University of California Press, 2015).
5. See also Karen Chapple and Elizabeth Mattiuzzi, "Planting the Seeds for a Sustainable Future: HUD's Sustainable Communities Initiative Regional Planning Grant Program," Berkeley: Center for Community Innovation, 2015 and Karen Frick and Karen Chapple, et al, "Collaboration and Equity in Regional Sustainability Planning in the U.S. and California: Challenges in Implementation," *California Journal of Politics and Policy* 7, no. 4 (2015).
6. This includes the three highest rankings, "Some", "Great extent", and "Very great extent" out of five

possible choices.

7. Question 8: N=40. *"Please provide an example of a new collaboration"* and Question 9a: N=32. *"If possible, please provide an example of a continuing relationship."*
8. Question 5: N=40. *"Please provide an example that illustrates a change in your relationship with local governments in your region."*
9. Ross Montojo and St. Louis <http://www.planningsustainableregions.org/sustainable-communities-initiative-research>
10. In some regions, however, municipalities that were not involved in the SCI-RPG planning are now becoming involved in implementation because they see the benefits of the plan and the outcome of demonstration projects funded by the SCI-RPG. See Elizabeth Mattiuzzi, SCI case studies at www.planningsustainableregions.org, forthcoming.
11. Question 17. *"Please share an example of successful integration of social equity into your region's process or plan."*
12. For regions such as East Arkansas and the New River Valley, creating or enhancing a regional data portal was a key outcome of the SCI-RPG. See Elizabeth Mattiuzzi, SCI case studies at www.planningsustainableregions.org, forthcoming.
13. Question 20: *"Please share a notable example of a policy, program or investment outlined in your regional plan for sustainable development that was implemented."*