



Vibrant Communities – Robust Region

Q&A

Q. What is "CONNECT Our Future: Vibrant Communities – Robust Region"?

A. "CONNECT Our Future" is a process in which communities, counties, businesses, educators, non-profits and other organizations work together to grow jobs and the economy, improve quality of life and control the cost of government. This project will create a regional growth framework developed through extensive community engagement and built on what communities identify as existing conditions, future plans and needs, and potential strategies. It is supported by a \$4.9 million HUD Sustainable Communities Grant and \$3 million in local in-kind public and private matching resources. The CONNECT Our Future three-year process will engage public, private and non-profit organizations across the 14-county region. It is based on, and builds from, the region's CONNECT vision.

Q. Why do we need a regional growth framework?

A. The population of the region is expected to grow by 50 percent in 20 years and double within 40 years. A regional growth framework will help us best utilize the limited resources that will be available for the infrastructure and systems necessary for growth. The CONNECT Our Future process will give us the opportunity to discuss how we want to address multi-billion dollar infrastructure investments and encourage existing and new business investment in our region. In similar collaborative processes, the Salt Lake City region identified \$4.5 billion and the Kansas City region identified \$2 billion in infrastructure savings.

Q. What counties are included in the 14-county grant area?

A. The grant area is the Greater Charlotte 14-county bi-state region which includes: Anson, Cabarrus, Cleveland, Gaston, Iredell, Lincoln, Mecklenburg, Rowan, Stanly and Union Counties in North Carolina, and Chester, Lancaster, Union and York Counties in South Carolina.

Q. What is the region's CONNECT vision?

A. In 2005-2008, the 14-county bi-state region came together and developed a vision for the region's future. That vision has been adopted by local governments representing more than 70 percent of the population within the region. Its six core values are:

- A strong, diverse economy;
- Sustainable, well-managed growth;
- A safe and healthy environment;
- High quality educational opportunities;
- Increased collaboration among jurisdictions; and,
- Enhanced social equity.

Q. What is the structure of CONNECT Our Future?

A. The CONNECT Consortium – a broad-based group of more than 100 governments, businesses, non-profits, educational institutions and organizations – is responsible for guiding the work in the process. The Centralina Council of Governments (CCOG), which was the grant recipient on behalf of the Consortium, and the Catawba Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) will coordinate, facilitate

and staff the process. Extensive public engagement with more than 80 events region wide is being designed to ensure communities and organizations of all sizes throughout the region, including traditionally under-represented groups, participate in the building of a regional growth framework.

Q. How will our community benefit from Consortium membership?

A. Joining the Consortium will benefit individual communities in a number of ways such as:

- Enabling them to work with other communities with shared challenges to identify strategies for success;
- Ensuring a community's needs and current/future plans are incorporated into the strategic framework;
- Allowing a community to participate in shaping tools that they can use which are the result of technical studies in areas such as housing;
- Allowing each member community to participate in a national Learning Network for the Sustainable Community grantees and their Consortium members. The network provides access to best practice opportunities;
- Qualifying member communities for Preferred Sustainability Status bonus points on some federal applications, and receiving consideration as a Sustainable Communities Consortium member on others; and,
- Enabling member communities to become part of an ongoing system of communities that problem-solves issues and works locally, regionally, and on a state and federal level for solutions.

Q. What is the national Learning Network for U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) grantees?

A. The National Sustainable Communities Learning Network provides members of the Consortium with the opportunity to build their planning capacity using "best practices" they learn about through webinars, publications and workshops. The Learning Network is a collaboration of HUD with multiple national organizations engaged in all aspects of regional and local planning.

Q. How does the Consortium's work get done?

A. The work of the Consortium gets done by the Consortium and its component work groups, forums and council, the public and the Centralina Council of Governments and Catawba Regional Council of Governments (CRCOG) boards.

- **The Consortium** plans and directs public engagement at the beginning, end, and throughout the process.
- **Consortium Program Work Groups** with local government, non-profit and business representation, develop components of the regional growth framework based on public engagement, information provided by Consortium partners, data collected, computer modeling and best practices.
- **The Public** participates throughout the entire process to identify a regional growth framework and a consensus-based growth alternative. The public will be engaged in ways that include open houses and public forums throughout the region, survey tools, website feedback, small group meetings with community organizations and a large regional summit.
- **Consortium Forums** review and integrate the Program Work Groups' work.
 - The Program Forum provides technical review.
 - The Policy Forum of elected officials and CEOs provides policy review.
 - The full Consortium produces final consensus recommendations.
- **CCOG & CRCOG Boards** provide quality control.

Q. What are the Connect Our Future Work Groups and what do they do?

A. There are nine CONNECT Our Future work groups that are involved in the work of developing individual components of the regional growth framework. The program work groups are: Economic Development, Housing, Energy, Air Quality, Food Access and Logistics, Public Health, Blueprinting, Public Engagement and Plan Alignment. The work groups include representatives with the technical expertise in program areas from throughout the region, both Consortium and non-Consortium members.

Q. How many representatives may we assign to the Consortium and what will they do?

A. Each Consortium member is asked to appoint two Consortium representatives:

- A senior staff member or department head to participate in the Consortium’s program forum. The program forum will work directly with the components of the regional growth framework developed by the program work groups.
- An elected official (or, if a non-profit or for-profit entity, someone at the CEO or Board level) to serve on the Consortium policy forum that will review program work and address policy implications.

For those organizations that may not have the capacity to appoint two members, a different arrangement may be negotiated. You may also appoint named alternates, and remember that all Consortium meetings are open meetings.

Q. Where are the \$7.9 million in CONNECT Our Future funds coming from?

A. Of the total \$7.9 million, \$4.9 million is a grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant program. The remaining \$3 million is in-kind matches being provided by various CONNECT Consortium members who are contributing time, expertise and other resources toward this project. The \$3 million in-kind match has already been committed by Consortium partners and does not represent a cost to any new organizations that are considering joining the Consortium.

Q. Is this \$4.9 million grant a "pass-through" grant like some of the others CCOG and CRCOG administer?

A. No. Although CCOG and CRCOG do administer many federal grant programs in the region providing pass-through grants for communities, this is not that type of federal grant. It is a 2011 grant awarded by the HUD Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grant Program. It will use extensive community-based public engagement to develop a regional growth framework to help communities and organizations, building on needs, existing plans and strategies.

Q. How is the \$7.9 million in CONNECT Our Future funds being spent?

A. The funds will be used to create a regional growth framework. Some of the elements that we expect to be a part of the framework include land use, transportation, housing, job creation and workforce training, energy efficiency, air and water quality, food systems, as well as other physical and social infrastructure within our region. In order for communities, businesses, non-profits and others to create a consensus growth framework for the region, the funds will be used for:

- Public engagement forums throughout the process and throughout the 14-county region, to engage the communities, businesses, non-profits, other public and private sector organizations as well as the general public, in creating a regional framework.
- Technical studies to assess, problem-solve and develop strategies in areas of challenges facing the region such as the economy, housing, air quality, energy, food/agriculture and public health.
- Data collection and analysis including compilation of local land use and transportation maps and plans into a regional database; modeling and mapping software to project current land use trends into the future; identification of current trends, opportunities and challenges in the region; development of multiple regional growth scenarios based on local input and feedback; and analysis of how those scenarios impact the issues deemed important to local governments in the region.
- Identification of grant funding opportunities to support implementation and development of a framework for continuous improvement.
- Public meeting logistics, facilitation, and process communications.

The grant funds are received on a reimbursable basis, meaning, as work is completed to create the regional growth framework, they are reimbursed by HUD. The Sustainable Communities grant from HUD is not comprised of “pass-through” funds that are divided among communities, rather the funds are used for specific tasks and activities to help achieve the broader regional framework.

Q. How will the CONNECT Our Future regional growth framework be developed?

A. The three-year CONNECT Our Future process will only be successful if it is created through broad participation from communities including residents, businesses, elected officials, non-profit representatives and other stakeholders in our region. The region's public will help develop the regional growth framework in four different phases: identifying community needs, values and opportunities; participating in community-based growth exercises; providing feedback on regional growth options, and providing feedback on a consensus-based selected growth option and framework for growth. More detail will be available on this process as the project progresses.

Q. What's the general schedule for the public engagement process for "CONNECT Our Future?"

A. Public engagement will be local and community-based. Public Engagement and collaboration will occur:

- Oct. 2012 to Feb. 2013 – Identifying community needs and values.
- Mid-2013 – Public engagement on options for community growth.
- Late 2013 to Early-2014 – Public engagement on scenarios for regional growth.
- Mid to Late 2014 – Public engagement on a consensus-based growth scenario and framework for growth.

Q. Where will the public engagement sessions be held and where?

A. There will be about 30 public open houses held in various locations throughout the region to get input from residents, in the first phase of public engagement from October 2012 to Feb. 2013. More details on the schedule, location and other open house details will be available in October.

Q. What kind of outcomes have other regions realized from collaborative planning?

A. Examples of benefits other regions have realized are listed below.

- The Kansas City region identified more than \$2 billion in infrastructure savings (over the life of Long Range Transportation Plans and other projected capital expenditures).
- The Salt Lake City region identified more than \$4.5 billion in infrastructure savings (over the life of Long Range Transportation Plans and other projected capital expenditures).
- The Sacramento region got the mix of housing they needed for their aging population.
- The Chattanooga and Knoxville regions revitalized their urban cores.
- The Birmingham region developed more affordable housing.
- Most regions realized reduced growth in vehicle miles traveled.
- All regions were able to more effectively use limited federal funds.

Q. What is our organization's commitment to CONNECT Consortium?

A. Organizations that join the Consortium will be asked to sign an agreement and commit to doing the following:

- Share data on existing conditions and future plans (e.g. land use, transportation, utilities).
- Appoint representatives to come to meetings and help guide and shape the CONNECT Our Future process.
- Help shape a future framework and tools to meet your community needs. Tell us the challenges your community faces and what you need.
- Get members of your community or organization to participate in public engagement throughout the process.

There is no financial cost and the commitment for the \$3 million in-kind match in local resources has already been made by a number of Consortium members. Any organization interested in joining the Consortium can schedule a brief presentation giving them an opportunity to learn more and consider a Consortium agreement.

Q. If we join the CONNECT Our Future Consortium but choose to opt out, can we?

A. Yes, you may opt out. You will be asked to provide data that's needed up front to enable a regional growth framework to be produced for other members that rely on some regional information. But hopefully you will find this process so beneficial in helping address the issues that matter to your community; you will want to continue to have your voice represented in the Consortium.

Q. Why do we need to collaborate to face our challenges?

A. Many communities in this region currently face similar challenges, such as unemployment, housing needs, and a desire to attract and retain young people. By working together we can develop better solutions, align our strategies and resources, and build an even greater future for our own communities and our region.

Q. Why should I get involved? How can I get involved?

A. This is YOUR process. A collaborative success will occur only if businesses, governments, workforce, educators, non-profits, organizations and others work together on strategies for our future.

You can:

- Join the CONNECT Our Future Consortium – Schedule a meeting to learn more about joining the Consortium.
- Participate in CONNECT Public Engagement – About 30 open house events throughout the region in Phase 1.

For more information contact:

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