

## **Collaboration and Equity in Regional Sustainability Planning in California: Challenges in Implementation**

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Regions across the United States have developed sustainability plans and programs funded through the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Sustainable Communities Initiative (SCI). The SCI program was an experiment in regional sustainability planning in which grantees received federal awards in 2010 or 2011, with HUD providing funding and technical assistance to grantees through 2015. HUD designed the program to increase cooperation between regional actors whose activities, such as housing, transportation, and economic development, typically occur in different policy "silos." The program promoted the incorporation of social equity frameworks and metrics into economic and environmental sustainability-related activities, areas in which there are benefits to taking a regional approach.

The HUD-SCI program provides an opportunity to assess how regions incorporate equity into plans and inform the next generation of regional planning. California is a particularly interesting site for assessing the success of the HUD-SCI program in promoting regional cooperation and social equity because of SB 375, a state law mandating regional sustainability planning. This paper assesses the variation across regions within California in incorporating social equity into HUD-SCI grant planning activities. It does this by presenting three case studies of the role of social equity in regional sustainability planning in the Sacramento metropolitan area, the San Francisco Bay Area, and the Fresno region of the Central Valley.

This paper fills a gap in the sustainability governance literature by providing insight into how equitable the regional sustainability planning process is. The urban design literature on sustainability is largely prescriptive (Calthorpe and Fulton 2001), proposing compact urban form without assessing how agencies with varied responsibilities in regions incorporate equity into sustainability plans (Berke and Conroy 2000; Jepson and Edwards 2010). The literature on regional planning is largely descriptive, explaining the conditions under which regional agencies can cooperate to achieve regional goals, with or without federal incentives (e.g., Seltzer and Carbonell 2011). Regional equity scholarship, with its strong focus on social movements, would benefit from a better understanding of the planning and governance processes that these movements seek to shape (Pastor, Benner, and Matsuoka 2009). The inherent tensions in balancing the three Es, equity, environment, and the economy (Campbell 1996), with competing stakeholder perspectives and interests, complicates regional sustainability planning.

Despite these challenges, many are optimistic about the future of regional sustainability planning (Chapin 2012; Chapple 2014). Regional sustainability planning is an opportunity to accommodate growth through compact development, while avoiding the socially inequitable outcomes of past federally subsidized projects of urban renewal and suburbanization (Chapin 2012). Chapin calls for more nuanced research on the potential for socially equitable regional planning that combines case studies and analytical approaches.

Our paper responds to this call by examining how California's wave of regional sustainability planning, spurred by federal policy and a state mandate, incorporates social equity. What forms of regional collaboration are most conducive to incorporating equity, and under what conditions? This question is particularly relevant given the overlap in sustainable planning activities between regions implementing federal SCI grants and SB 375. We begin to answer it by unpacking the regional sustainability planning process and its inclusion or exclusion of social equity goals and voices in our three California regions. We conclude with policy implications and recommendations for planning practice and research.

## **Framing the Analysis**

Our research builds on literature in regional sustainability planning and collaborative planning. Resource management, climate change, congestion, and social inequality have been main drivers of interest in regional sustainability planning in recent decades (e.g., Boarnet 2010; Saha and Paterson 2008; Sanchez 1999). Given the challenge of solving these problems at the level of the individual jurisdiction, initial solutions have focused on regional government or, given the limited success of regional governments in the U.S., governance, or "bottom-up" collaboration across the public and private sectors (Seltzer and Carbonell 2011; Stone 1989). Although rational choice theorists may be skeptical about the potential for regional governance to guide substantive cooperation and change, there may be as yet undiscovered motivations for collective action in the regional context (Basolo 2003).

The most pervasive forms of regional governments in the United States are councils of government (COGs) and metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs). Established widely due to federal policy in the 1960s (Dreier, Swanstrom, and Mollenkopf 2000), COGs are a voluntary organization of local governments that originally channeled federal housing grants, while MPOs were created to develop regional transportation plans. COGs have, if anything, lost power in recent years, while MPOs received a major boost in the 1990s after Congress enacted legislation increasing their authority to program federal transportation dollars (Weiner 1999; Altshuler and Joint Center for Urban Studies 1979; Goldman and Deakin 2000).

While MPOs and COGS may use the carrot of federal infrastructure funding, they do not have authority over local land-use decisions. In California, SB 375 has instituted state emissions targets for regions (Barbour and Deakin 2012) and propelled regional agencies into greater coordination with each other and municipal governments. Agencies with weak authority must be entrepreneurial about building support for their agendas both between scales of government and across sectors (Christensen 1999). SB 375 requires regional government agencies to work across issue silos, e.g., transportation and housing, and coordinate with government and nongovernment actors beyond their traditional relationships. The HUD-SCI grant has provided resources and an additional incentive for these activities.

Regional planning, with its lack of command-and-control authority, often involves efforts to bring disparate entities together to forge consensus. The planning field and related research has

evolved from employing predominantly rational, technical approaches for addressing planning problems to promoting more inclusive, public planning processes (Chapin 2012). Scholars point to the potential for collaborative planning to facilitate substantive dialogue between a diverse mix of community members, key stakeholders, and planners (e.g., Healey 1997; Innes and Booher 1999; Forester 1999; Innes and Rongerude 2013).

Innes and Booher identify additional key elements for inclusive planning: leadership and sponsors to initiate efforts; resources to provide staff support and assist participants with attending meetings, particularly representatives from disadvantaged communities and the nonprofit sector; incentives to encourage people to “stay at the table and work toward agreement”; a “negotiating document” around which to come to agreement; and “a self organizing adapting process that evolve[s] with new information” (2010, 89–116). The success of governance by these networks depends on the history of cooperation or conflict between the players and the institutional design of the agency or agencies involved, as well as the grant process itself (Ansell and Gash 2008). The ability of governance networks to contribute to long-term prosperity in a region is in part dependent on the diversity of perspectives and expertise contained within them (Benner and Pastor 2015).

Innes and Booher (1999) identify potential tangible and intangible results of an inclusive and collaborative planning process. Tangible products include adopted policies and plans, legislation, innovative strategies, and follow-up efforts aimed at implementation entailing “spin off partnerships and collaborative projects.” Intangible outcomes of collaborative planning include increased learning and trust between participants, which in turn facilitate stronger communication and networks of relationships (414–415). Others argue that collaborative planning does little to correct imbalances in power between actors, skepticism of scientific knowledge being used, and past histories of contestation between participants (e.g., Hiller 2002; Purcell 2009).

Arguments from both critics and proponents of communicative planning hinge squarely on issues of equity and power, which leads us to ask: what is the potential role social equity may play within regional sustainability planning processes? Social equity here encompasses two dimensions: equity in outcomes, i.e., the equal distribution of life chances, services meeting basic needs, and the ability to realize one’s full potential, as well as equity in process, or democratic representation (and voice) in planning processes (Fainstein 2010). Although the planning field previously saw “equity planning” as the procedural equity, which involved planners advocating from *inside* government (Davidoff 1965), increasingly equity planning connotes inclusion, participation, and collaboration from a broader range of underrepresented interests (Pastor and Benner 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Lester and Reckhow (2012) argue that regional equity discussions are not solved simply through one-time processes or through network governance. They posit that regions are not a “real scale” compared to cities and states and such discussions are relatively fruitless. Business interests and foundations have traditionally set the agendas for voluntary regional initiatives (Innes and Gruber 2005). Equity has traditionally been an afterthought or unevenly considered at the local level (Saha and Paterson 2008; Pearsall and Pierce 2010; Portney 2005). One potential

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<sup>1</sup> Thus, as defined herein, planning for social equity is broader than (but may include) “equity planning,” which is “a framework in which urban planners working within government use their research, analytical, and organizing skills to influence opinion, mobilize underrepresented constituencies, and advance and perhaps implement policies and programs that redistribute public and private resources to the poor and working class in cities.” (Metzger, 1995, p. 113).

avenue for addressing equity is through city-suburb cooperation, which seemed promising due to similar fiscal pressures on both (Orfield 2002). However, municipal political leaders continue to act based on narrow self-interest rather than forming alternative regional or statewide coalitions (Weir, Wolman, and Swanstrom 2005).

Innovative forms of regional cooperation have emerged recently in economic development, transit, service provision, foreclosure mitigation, and other areas (Katz and Bradley 2013; Kneebone and Berube 2013). However, Bollens' (Bollens 2002) finding that equity made its way into regional policies only "through the back door" is still relevant. Regional government agencies incorporate equity into their work mostly in response to federal and state programs and funding opportunities that explicitly or indirectly serve to increase social equity in air quality, civil rights, fair housing, and poverty reduction, among other policy areas (Bollens 2002). In other words, it takes a top-down mandate or incentive, usually on a seemingly separate issue (hence the issue coming in through the "back door" rather than directly), to provide an opening for equity advocates and regional agencies to cooperate.

A California example is the state-mandated Regional Housing Needs Assessment (RHNA), a complex, mediated process in which the state, regions and local jurisdictions assess the amount of housing needed in California by affordability level over the long term. After much deliberation, cities incorporate these housing figures into their general plans, and regions use this information for analysis in their state-required SB 375 "Sustainable Communities Strategy" plans. Without a state mandate, it is questionable whether regional agencies would pursue affordable housing at the current scale.

There is little current research bridging the literature on regional sustainability planning, inclusive planning processes, and social equity. Our research fills this gap by analyzing the institutional structure of regional governance, specifically how cooperation between different agencies and outside actors impacts the integration of social equity concerns into regional sustainability planning. We aim to provide constructive findings for planners and funders considering future regional sustainability programs and processes, particularly in light of potentially continually shrinking fiscal resources to propel similar efforts. Thus, we explore the following research questions and hypotheses in our empirical analysis:

1. Regional Collaboration: To what extent has regional collaboration occurred in the application and implementation processes for the SCI grants? What factors contribute to or inhibit regional collaboration in the planning process? What intangible and tangible outcomes have resulted to date?

Hypothesis 1: The type and extent of regional collaboration depends on the diversity of stakeholders represented, the extent and type of leadership exercised (particularly by an MPO), the ability of these parties to overcome historic and current power dynamics, and their incentives to come to the table and create a joint product. If the process works, both tangible and intangible outcomes result.

2. Equity: To what extent are procedural and outcome-based equity approaches incorporated into the SCI applications and planning processes? What kinds of strategies are considered? What factors contribute to or inhibit the inclusion of equity (both procedural and outcome-related)?

Hypothesis 2: Equity considerations are often an afterthought to regional planning processes and, when incorporated, are coincident to the actual process and are more likely pursued because of state or federal programs or requirements.

## **Background and Research Approach**

This section provides background on the HUD program, our research approach and the case study regions.

### **About the HUD Program**

The SCI-Regional Planning Grant program awarded a total of \$98 million in grants in 2010 and \$70 million in 2011 to regions for planning or planning and implementation.<sup>2</sup> The grant attempts to “support metropolitan and multijurisdictional planning efforts that integrate housing, land use, economic and workforce development, transportation, and infrastructure investments.” The goal of these planning efforts is to make improvements in the areas of “(1) economic competitiveness and revitalization, (2) social equity, inclusion, and access to opportunity, (3) energy use and climate change, and (4) public health and environmental impact.” Acknowledging the complexity of sustainable development governance and the desire to break down silos at the federal and local levels, HUD required applicants to organize a consortium of government entities and nonprofit partners, including the region’s principal city or county, additional cities to represent no less than 50% of the region’s population, the MPO or regional planning agency, and a nonprofit organization, foundation or educational institution.

Applicants were selected for Sustainable Communities Regional Planning Grants through rating factors that assessed the consortium members’ capacity to carry out the grant activities and their commitment to cooperation; the region’s social, environmental, economic, and infrastructure needs; the soundness of the consortium’s proposed grant activities; what resources the group had leveraged; and how they planned to measure and evaluate their activities.

Applicants can use HUD-SCI funding to improve regional planning and decision-making processes, coordination among agencies, and data collection. Improving regional planning might involve creating integrated plans for inclusive housing, sustainable transportation, and economic development. Coordination among agencies could include conducting scenario planning or climate impact assessments. The HUD-SCI program focused on providing housing and transportation choices within the region, not simply shifting demand outside the region.

### **Research Approach**

This paper presents three regional case studies based on in-depth interviews and participant observation. We selected all three winners in California that HUD categorized as having already completed substantial sustainability planning but were in need of support to implement those

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<sup>2</sup> Grant amounts depended on the size of the region, with \$25 million reserved for small- and medium-sized regions in 2010 and \$17.5 million reserved in 2011. A number of runners-up in the 2010 round were granted “Preferred Sustainability Status” (PSS) and were given greater consideration in the 2011 round.

plans.<sup>3</sup> The three cases share the same state and HUD funding context, but vary along institutional lines, stage of SB 375 implementation, project organization, and approach to equity (Table 1).

The purpose of the case studies is to further examine our research questions and hypotheses for projects on the ground, particularly with respect to the process and outcomes to date. The San Joaquin Valley took a decentralized approach, excluding the region's MPOs and driven by municipal interests in developing smart growth plans and educational activities to grow the base for a sustainability movement, especially among marginalized groups. In stark contrast, the San Francisco Bay Area's regional planning agencies, led by its MPO in partnership with the COG, are at the forefront of an ambitious plan involving numerous nonprofit and community-based organizations (CBOs) to develop strategies for increasing employment and affordable housing opportunities for low- and moderate-income households.

In the Sacramento region, a joint MPO-Council of Governments (COG) has ensured broad participation from local governments in coordinated sustainability planning to meet the region's carbon emission reduction goals. Each region addressed equity explicitly in its grant application and execution. Although the San Diego region was the first in the state to complete a Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), the core requirement of SB 375, it could not be considered for the analysis because its application was rejected for HUD funding and one of our selection criteria for consistency across cases was to examine only HUD-funded projects.

We gathered evidence on the California cases through 18 semi-structured, in-person interviews that lasted one hour on average (seven in the Bay Area, six in Sacramento, and five in Fresno), and a review of key documents. The HUD-SCI program's major focus is on key stakeholder involvement, and, thus, our interviewees represented the primary interests in each project with the following distribution across stakeholder categories: five regional planners, three city planners, four nonprofit organization staff, and three equity-focused representatives, as well as three academics/critics knowledgeable about the process (one such interviewee per case study) for a broader perspective. Our interviews focused on application development as well as the extent of regional collaboration and inclusion to date in line with our research questions.

Interviewees across the various stakeholder groups typically noted existing structural power struggles, tensions, and challenges. However, to maintain interviewee anonymity, interviewee statements, particularly quotations, are not attributed by name or stakeholder category. In two regions, we had the opportunity to conduct participant observation. In the San Joaquin Valley one co-author was conducting related research and attending regular SCI meetings and capacity building workshops. In the Bay Area, two co-authors became grantees of the HUD project and regularly attended SCI meetings and workshops.<sup>4</sup>

The following section provides context for each case and analyzes how collaboration and incorporation of equity concerns transpired in each region.

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<sup>3</sup> The three cases are of Type 2 winners that had already undertaken substantial sustainability planning. The other category of Type 1 winners had not previously undertaken any substantial regional sustainability planning.

<sup>4</sup> Two authors of this paper received a grant, Regional Early Warning System, to identify the areas potentially susceptible to gentrification and/or displacement.

**Table 1. Key Characteristics of California Cases**

Region	Bay Area	Fresno	Sacramento
Lead Agency Type	MPO	University Foundation	joint COG-MPO
Grant Award Year	2011	2010	2010
Regional population (MSA 2012)	7.2 million	4 million	2.3 million
Federal Grant Amount	\$5 million	\$4 million	\$1.5 million
Local Match	48%	66%	171%

Source: ABAG, MTC, SACOG, and California State University, Fresno.

## **Background**

### **Smart Valley Places: Seeding Smart Growth in the San Joaquin Valley**

At the heart of California sits the San Joaquin Valley, over 27,000 square miles of agricultural land that feeds the nation and is home to nearly four million people. One of the poorest regions in the country (Cowan 2005), many San Joaquin Valley communities suffer from extreme poverty, low rates of education, and high unemployment (Burd-Sharps, Lewis, and Martins 2008). Low-density sprawl has been the dominant mode of development on the outskirts of cities and in unincorporated rural areas of counties, a trend that accelerated during the housing boom of the mid-2000s. Many affluent and poor communities in the valley remain unincorporated, a type of regional fragmentation that has had significant impacts on the distribution of resources and access to services.

Whereas the wealthy unincorporated communities (e.g., county islands in the city of Fresno) are able to pay lower tax rates, poor unincorporated communities are often cut off from urban resources and services even when living right next door. In theory, these areas would be supported by county services. Instead, services are often inadequate; poor, unincorporated communities are frequently unable to generate sufficient income through special districts to access basic services such as potable water, sewage treatment, sidewalks, and streetlights (Rubin et al. 2007; Seaton and Jacobs 2010).

Regional planning in the San Joaquin Valley began in 2005 with the Regional Blueprint Planning process and the creation of the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley. The Blueprint process, led by the Valley's eight Councils of Government (one for each county, also serving as MPOs), produced eight preferred growth scenarios that were consolidated into a valley-wide blueprint that called for higher-density developments and adopted 12 smart growth principles that included the creation of a range of housing opportunities and choices, walkable and bikeable neighborhoods, a mix of land uses and provision of a variety of transportation choices, among others (Harnish et al. 2010).

The governor tasked the California Partnership, run out of Fresno State University, to develop a strategic plan for long-term economic prosperity and quality of life in the valley by forming

ten working groups of valley leaders on such issues as economic development, workforce development, health, transportation, and land use. A key priority has been the implementation of an integrated framework for sustainable growth, building off the blueprint plan. The partnership has remained voluntary and has no decision-making power in the Valley.

### **The Smart Valley Places Program**

Following completion of the blueprint in 2009, several valley leaders saw the HUD-SCI as an opportunity to implement some of the blueprint principles. They chose Fresno State as the lead agency for the application, given its role in the regional California Partnership. Under the assumption that the COGs had little power to implement smart growth planning, which fell mostly under local jurisdictions, the application structured the program (“Smart Valley Places”) around the valley’s largest cities. Ultimately 14 of the valley’s largest cities, excluding Bakersfield (Figure 1) signed on to become part of the consortium and selected specific projects to fund, mostly representing land-use planning activities such as general plan and zoning code updates already in the pipeline. Some cities chose projects that represent a more holistic understanding of planning as it relates to the environment and health such as climate action plans and a health and wellness plan.<sup>5</sup>

Based on the belief that the valley lacked the civic capacity necessary to advance smart growth policies, the program designers wrote into the grant application a Community Leadership component to cultivate community capacity to engage in planning-related issues and to press for Smart Growth measures around the valley. Four regional nonprofits were included in the grant to coordinate the Community Leadership program to engage traditionally marginalized communities in planning and improve communication and collaboration between community groups and government agencies. The grant ended in 2013.

Due to inequalities in the size and power of the different cities participating in the program, the project designers decided early on to allocate resources evenly between cities to ensure that all participating cities felt included. Each city received \$200,000 to carry out its projects, while the Community Leadership component was allocated close to \$400,000, approximately half of which went to a regional nonprofit that provided workshops and training to city staff and leadership, and half went to capacity building of low-income residents.

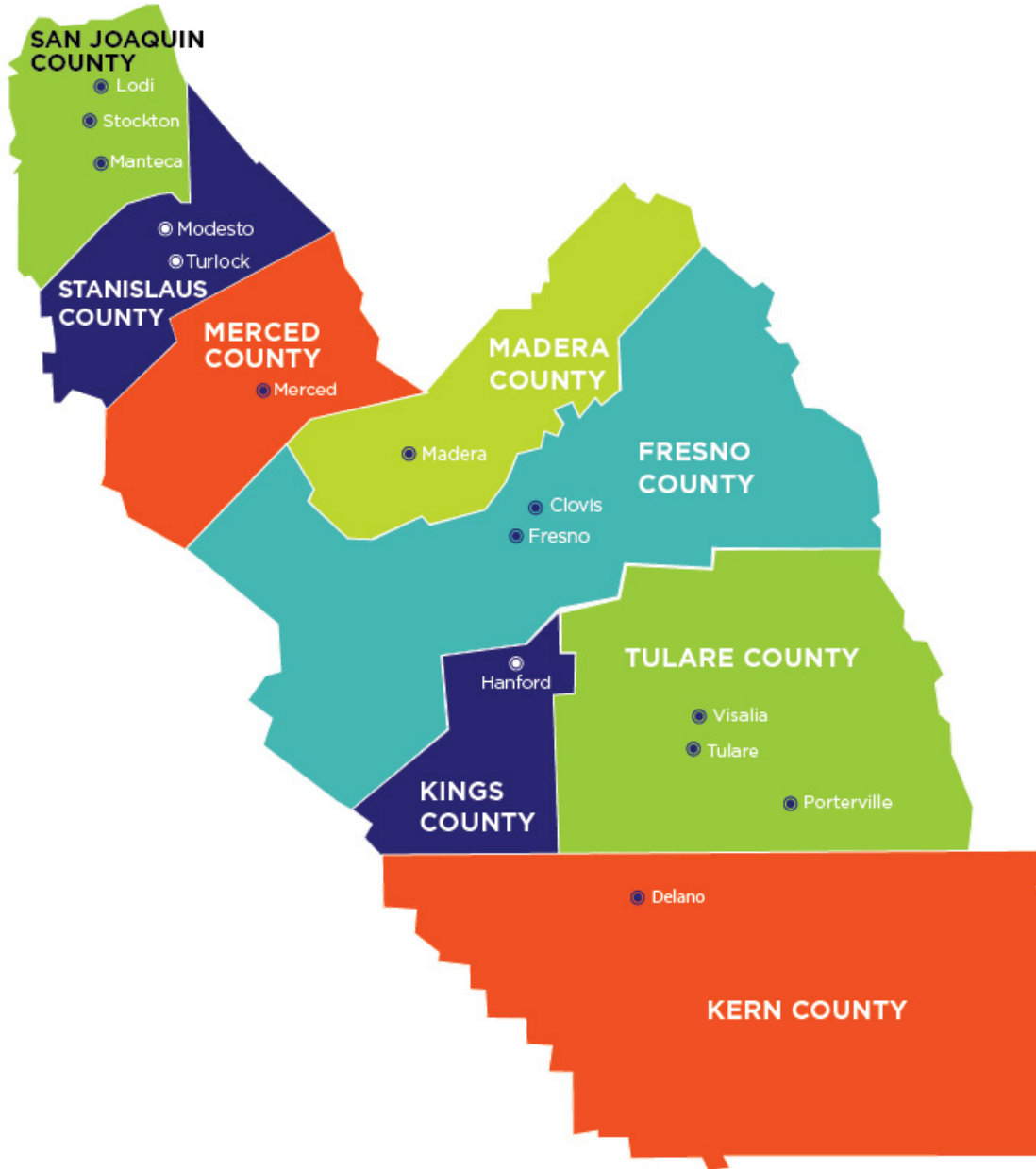
To encourage their participation, project designers assured cities they would have autonomy over the Smart Valley Places funding they were to receive. Thus, cities and consortium leaders decided on projects and allocations prior to the receipt of the grant and little collaborative decision making was necessary for program implementation. Nevertheless, the Executive Committee governance structure was created to jointly decide on capacity-building, monitor the grant spending, and plan conferences.

The Executive Committee consisted of one representative from each of the 14 member cities and one from the Community Leadership group, the Regional Policy Council (a body that coor-

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<sup>5</sup> The complete list of projects are: Climate Action Plan (Lodi, Stockton, Manteca, Visalia), General Plan Update (Fresno, Manteca, Modesto, Turlock, Clovis, Visalia), Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan (Manteca), Development/zoning code update (Fresno, Lodi, Merced, Turlock), Watershed stewardship plan (Lodi), Water and Sewer Infrastructure Plans (Madera), Master EIR (Fresno), Community outreach (Visalia), Transit-oriented development (Tulare), Economic development strategic plan (Porterville), Downtown Specific Plan (Hanford), Green Building ordinance (Delano), Health and Sustainability Element for General Plan (Delano) (OCED 2014).

**Figure 1. Smart Valley Places Cities**



Source: Smart Valley Places

inated the COGs as part of the blueprint process), the California Partnership for the San Joaquin Valley, and several others to total 19 members. As a result, the cities had the majority vote on the Executive Committee. This was intentional, as one interviewee explained, to “put the cities in the driver’s seat” and encourage their leadership to promote smart growth across the region.

## **San Francisco Bay Area: All Roads Lead to Equitable Prosperity?**

The San Francisco Bay Area in northern California is a highly diverse and complex region with over seven million people, 101 cities, nine counties, two dozen transit agencies, and four regional agencies—the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC) as the MPO, the Association of Bay Area Governments (ABAG) as the COG, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, and the Bay Conservation and Development Commission overseeing the San Francisco Bay. The four regional boards consist largely of mayors, city council members, and county supervisors appointed to serve by local bodies and not elected directly to their board position.

Vocal business, labor, environmental, social justice, and other nonprofit and private sector interests play a role in regional discussions, further adding complexity to public engagement. As a result, coordinated transportation and land-use planning has been challenging, but some success has occurred with preserving greenbelt areas and concentrating growth in some portions of the region. Further, the region suffers from high inequality in the distribution of wealth and services, and its economy is subject to boom-bust cycles partly due to being home to technology-dependent Silicon Valley.

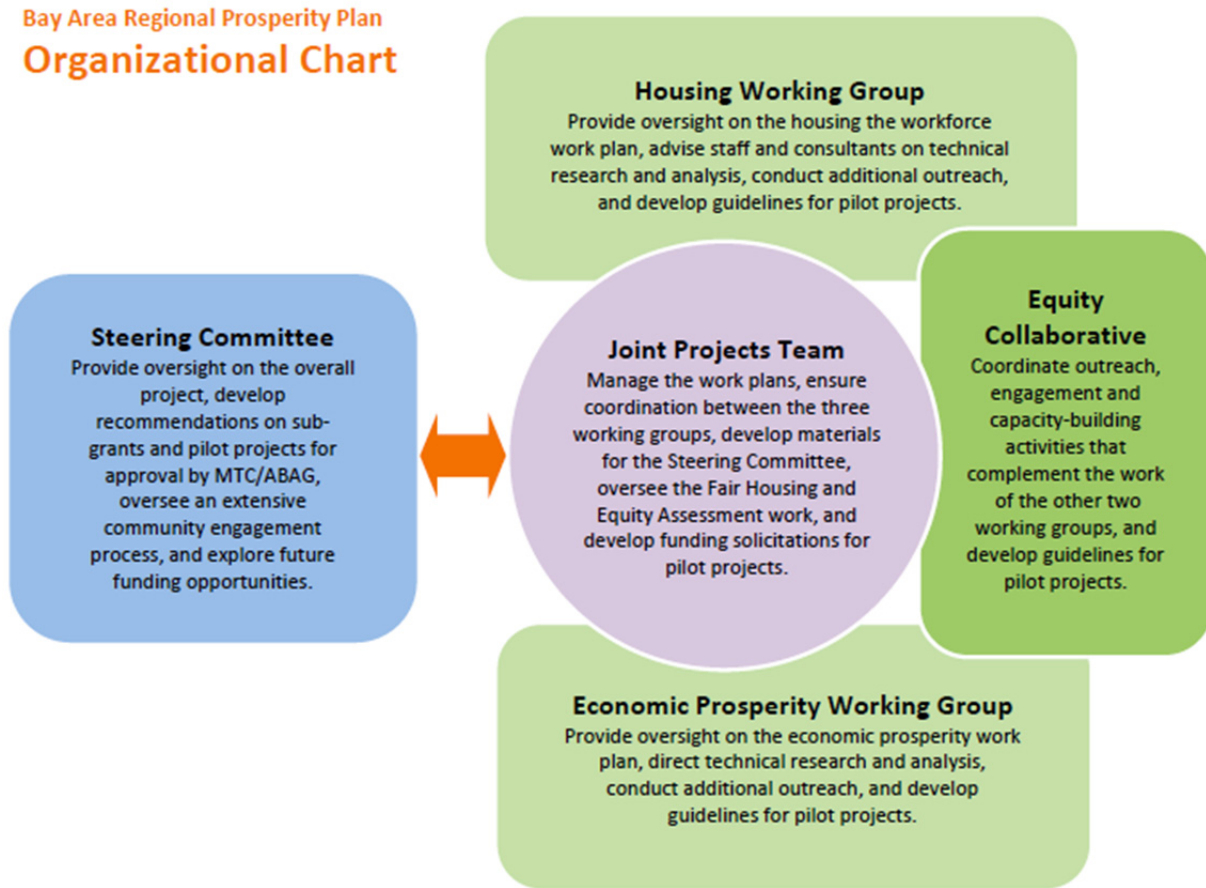
After an early (2003) effort at blueprint planning, MTC and ABAG most recently developed a regional growth strategy based on city-nominated areas that are either prime for compact mixed-use development, called Priority Development Areas, or for protecting undeveloped land, called Priority Conservation Areas. This growth strategy provides the foundation for the region's first Sustainable Communities Strategy (SCS), required by the state of California through state Senate Bill 375 of 2008.

MTC and ABAG and numerous nonprofit and CBOs are at the forefront of an ambitious HUD-funded effort that was completed in mid-2015. The consortium's intention was to develop a Prosperity Plan in tandem with the region's state-required SCS, called Plan Bay Area, which was adopted in July 2013 to meet state and federal requirements for plan completion. However, SCI grant processing and project initiation took longer than anticipated. The goal was to ensure that the larger state-required regional plan's implementation would be "centered on addressing the needs of people with the greatest barriers to economic opportunity, who will be the most heavily impacted by uncoordinated regional growth, and who have had the greatest difficulty participating in planning processes (MTC 2011, 2)." Capacity building was a key component of the Bay Area project, which targeted CBOs and gave little attention to local government or other public agency staffing needs or capacity.

The Prosperity Plan had three tracks: (1) an Economic Opportunity Strategy that focused on economic and workforce development at the local and regional level, (2) a Housing the Workforce Initiative that focused on strategies to aid the production and retention of affordable housing and the reduction of household displacement and neighborhood gentrification, and (3) the Equity Collaborative, which ensured equity principles are incorporated into the first two tracks and focuses on community engagement. Rather than focus on changing the behavior of private-sector actors and the market, the strategies mostly suggested reforms to public policies and planning processes related to housing and jobs.

A committee oversaw each track with members largely representing nonprofits and CBOs but with some local government, business and labor participation as well (Figure 2). Another committee, the Joint Projects Team, discussed synergies and potential overlap between the three tracks and consisted of the co-chairs of the track-based committees. Finally, a steering committee oversaw the overall planning effort and had final policy and decision-making authority as its

**Figure 2. Bay Area Committee Organizational Chart**



Source: MTC/ABAG

members drew from the various committees and the MTC and ABAG boards that are made up primarily of local elected officials. MTC and ABAG staff provided technical and administrative support to the committees that met on a monthly basis.

The Economic Opportunity and Housing tracks oversaw the distribution of approximately \$1 million each in grants for pilot projects with the Equity Collaborative dispersing \$750,000. Housing track projects focused mostly on building and preserving affordable housing around transit and preventing displacement, with a median funding amount of \$50,000. Equity track projects targeted capacity building for CBOs. An additional \$450,000 supported development of a regional economic strategy and associated list of potential implementation pilot projects. The balance supported administration and program evaluation including \$500,000 for track co-chairs and committee member stipends to support participation.

## **Sacramento: A Model for Collaboration?**

The Sacramento region is home to over two million people, 470,000 of whom live in the central city. It suffered one of the highest foreclosure rates in the nation during the housing bubble collapse starting in 2008, and unemployment remained high until 2014. Multiple activity centers fan out from the central grid along the region's freeways and rivers stretching south into the agricultural valley and northeast to the Tahoe basin.

Sacramento was in many ways a test run for the type of blueprint planning that has been emulated throughout the state and provided a model for SB 375. Sacramento's blueprint process in the early 2000s involved dozens of community workshops around the region, although equity concerns were less prominent in the final blueprint than environmental and economic concerns (Benner and Pastor 2011). The relationships built during the blueprint process paved the way for collaboration on the HUD grant and the SB 375-mandated SCS. After advocating individually during the blueprint process, a coalition of equity and environmental nonprofits identified areas of common interest and formed the Sustainable Communities Working Group (SCWG).

The Sacramento Area Council of Governments (SACOG) led the HUD Sustainable Communities grant application, planning, and implementation process beginning in 2009. Sacramento's HUD Sustainable Communities Initiative grant was the result of collaboration between local and national nonprofits, regional agencies, and a university partner. Most players were familiar with each other, both on an organizational and an individual staff level as a result of previous collaboration on the regional "blueprint" planning process. The HUD-SCI grant consortium included different working groups on infrastructure, economic development, housing, equity, and natural resources. In developing the priorities for the HUD-SCI grant, SACOG solicited ideas from different consortium members, and, according to outside groups, was very open to input on how to approach the grant. Different groups brought potential contributions to the table, rather than having top-down work assignments.

SACOG adopted an SCS in 2012 that attempted to address the need for housing, jobs, and transportation choices in areas of concentrated poverty in the region, as well as the need for additional affordable housing in proximity to the region's job centers. The SCS incorporates principles and policies supported by the SCWG, including health monitoring, displacement prevention measures, and open space and farmland preservation. However, the elimination of redevelopment funding in California has left the region's housing agency in a bind in terms of loss of institutional knowledge and ability to finance new development. SACOG's combined responsibilities as an MPO and a COG contributed to its strong coordination on housing and transportation issues for blueprint, HUD-SCI, and SB 375 SCS planning.

Sacramento's HUD grant mainly contributed to SCS planning activities, including improvement of equity metrics for regional planning, as well as the planning and construction of transit-oriented development (TOD) demonstration projects. Through the HUD grant, SACOG developed a tool for determining if an infill project qualifies for environmental review streamlining under SB 375 and other state laws. Of the roughly 25 "transit priority areas" defined by SB 375 in the Sacramento region that could be eligible for environmental review streamlining, SACOG received 11 applications for demonstration projects to be funded by the HUD grant. From these, the HUD grant consortium in Sacramento set the goal of funding five TOD demonstration projects. Four of the projects were located in Sacramento County, and one was in West Sacramento, across the Sacramento River in Yolo County. The loss of state redevelopment funds and parcel assembly powers delayed affordable housing construction at the sites, although local agencies

were able to construct some pedestrian infrastructure (Stockton-Fruitridge corridor) and housing and streetscape improvements (R Street corridor) as demonstration projects using HUD-SCI funds. Subsequent grant funding from the state Strategic Growth Council has supported implementation of other aspects of SACOG's SCS.

## **Collaboration**

This section explores our hypothesis that effective regional collaboration depends on the diversity and type of stakeholders and leaders included, their ability to overcome historic and current power dynamics, and the incentives that they have to come to the table and create a joint product. If the process works, both tangible and intangible outcomes will result. The following looks at each in turn.

### **Stakeholders and Leadership**

The collaborative processes across the three regions differed significantly in inclusiveness. In name, the Bay Area process was the most inclusive, with 35 core partners from nonprofits, cities, counties, regional agencies, and economic development agencies. However, the process has been challenging as many interviewees noted. One interviewee used the analogy of a “triangular kayak” with each corner representing the key players of regional nonprofits, CBOs, and public agencies, as they awkwardly attempt to row and steer together. Further, local governments played a minor role in the governance process in the Bay Area; they were represented on the Steering Committee predominantly by regional agency board members, who only attended meetings sporadically. Likewise, the involvement of transit agencies, faith-based organizations, and small business has been minimal.

At the other end of the spectrum is Smart Valley Places, which deliberately excluded some of the more regionally oriented bodies, such as the COGs and counties, due to the proposal creators' perception that COGs are not implementers and lack vision. CBOs, nonprofits, and unincorporated areas also had a limited role. This was despite the fact that the Valley's COGs (each county has one COG that also serves as the MPOs) were the lead agencies in the creation of the 2009 blueprint plan on which Smart Valley Places was premised, as well as the Sustainable Communities Strategy mandated under SB 375. Furthermore, interviewees stated, the cities were unwilling to work with the counties due to a “long-standing, traditional mindset of just doing things alone because it's the way things have always been done. Getting past that and having them accept that they can trust new partners has been very tough.”

In addition, interviewees noted, little cross-sector interaction occurred through Smart Valley Places because most cities sent planning staff to represent them for quarterly meetings, instead of their city managers as they had agreed upon. Thus, rather than breaking down silos as originally intended by the SCI grant, the consortium acted to reinforce sectoral specializations, albeit while creating some geographic exchange. And although CBOs were included in the grant as part of the Community Leadership capacity-building efforts, they were only represented by one seat on the 19-member executive committee that was dominated by city staff, which will be discussed further below.

Likewise, although SACOG is, by all accounts, an exemplar for incorporating input from its consortium members, including equity and environmental groups, interviewees noted that its process excluded some voices on the HUD grant application and its implementation. In particular,

neighborhood organizations and suburban and rural counties had less direct input, although in some cases this may have been due to lack of capacity and/or interest from those groups and areas.

## **Power Dynamics**

In part because of these issues with inclusion, the Bay Area and San Joaquin Valley processes experienced challenges related to entrenched power dynamics. The Bay Area process attempted to upset power relations both among advocacy organizations and between the regional agencies. First, interviewees noted major tensions between nonprofits and CBOs during the grant-writing process because of the perception that affordable housing developers and larger nonprofit organizations such as TransForm, Greenbelt Alliance, and Urban Habitat already receive the lion's share of foundation funding in the region. As a result, the Prosperity Plan deliberately focused on the inclusion of the smallest, most progressive CBOs. The idea was that this would overturn existing power structures at the regional level; in practice though, since many of the major advocates, as well as cities and government agencies, were not at the table, entrenched power dynamics remained untouched. For example, several projects focused on renter protections, but the cities that would need to implement these reforms were not involved in the plan. Similarly, the Economic Prosperity Plan advocated a subregional minimum wage without gaining the widespread support of business groups.

Second, there are long-term historical tensions in the Bay Area between MTC (the MPO) and ABAG (the COG) having to do, at the most basic level, with MTC's control of transportation funding and ABAG's difficult mandate of monitoring affordable housing creation in the region. This interagency conflict, as well as the conflict between nonprofit groups, provided a background drama to the SCI grant process, with each agency trying to steer the working group co-chairs towards its own agenda.

In Smart Valley Places, little effort was made to upset historic power dynamics or to remedy the lack of trust between government agencies and community groups. Although CBOs and regional nonprofits were included in the grant to create Community Leadership institutes, their activity was limited to capacity-building activities that mostly involved other CBOs and nonprofits. While cities were occasionally involved in presenting at these institutes, their participation rarely resulted in collaborations on the specific projects that cities were being funded for through the grant. Furthermore, CBOs were limited to one voting seat on the 19-member executive committee, which reinforced these power dynamics along with what was perceived as an imbalanced funding structure, with over 70% of the budget going to city plans and only 5% going to community capacity building.

Tensions from the entrenched power dynamics became apparent in one of the few areas where joint decision-making was necessary in the Central Valley. HUD required each consortium to conduct a Fair Housing and Equity Analysis (FHEA) that would comprehensively analyze housing and infrastructure dynamics that enhance or limit opportunity in a region. For the SCI grant, HUD gave regions the option of conducting a Regional Analysis of Impediments to fair housing (RAI) instead, which would combine and replace each jurisdiction's required local Analysis of Impediments (AI), which is a precondition for receiving funds from many HUD programs (Pendall et al. 2013). An RAI could substitute for the 14 local analyses while supporting regional planning grant goals. The nonprofit partners participating in the Community Leadership program advocated for an RAI, since it was legally binding and required specific actions, in comparison to the FHEA, which had vision, but no teeth. Cities, however, were worried that an

RAI would put their federal funds in jeopardy and were unwilling to provide community groups with data and information prior to group meetings. The tensions were exacerbated by confusion created by conflicting actions taken by two HUD departments: the Office of Sustainable Housing and Communities, which oversaw the SCI and provided guidance on the FHEA; and the Office of Fair Housing and Equal Opportunity, which oversees the Analysis of Impediments. The Office of Fair Housing did not recognize either the RAI or the FHEA, which produced continued confusion over the best option to pursue. Ultimately, the cities chose to conduct the FHEA, despite the push for the RAI from the Community Leadership group, who only had one vote on the decision.

Effective regional planning processes need to incentivize participation, either by offering the opportunity to participate in a “negotiating document” or by providing resources (Innes and Booher 1999). The San Joaquin and Bay Area cases offer stark contrasts in this regard. In Smart Valley Places, it was difficult to keep participants engaged, possibly because there was no decision making about the grant or other activities that necessitated their participation. Some cities felt that the monthly calls and quarterly meetings were unnecessary, viewing meetings as containing little substance, simply updates on spending or plan conferences. As one interviewee stated, “They have no benefit to working together. They didn’t need each other. They need a reason to collaborate.” This absence of a reason to collaborate later manifested in dwindling participation in calls and meetings, which were the linchpin of information- and knowledge-sharing that the original Smart Valley Places proposal claimed would lead to more efficient problem solving around smart growth and sustainability implementation issues.

In contrast, the Bay Area’s Prosperity Plan offers significant carrots for participation, with nearly all the funding going to dozens of projects under each track. However, this has led to the perception that the participants simply wrote grants for themselves. In addition, committee co-chairs received \$20,000 each in compensation to ensure participation, particularly from under-resourced community-based and nonprofit organizations. At the same time, the process of obtaining resources through competition via a specific issue track has created the unintended consequence of funneling most economic/workforce development discussion into one silo and housing into another. The Steering Committee and Joint Projects Team were intended to mitigate this. However, the final project maintains three distinct issue areas—housing, communities, and jobs—without making connections among the three. This was made obvious during Housing Task Group meetings on residential displacement. Participants talked about the clear linkages between job growth and housing pressures, yet no attempt was made to connect the research being done for the economic prosperity plan with the work being done on housing production and preservation strategies. Without a more comprehensive view, the plan smooths over challenging tradeoffs—for instance, the competition for industrial land between residential developers and businesses providing middle-wage jobs (Bronstein 2015).

The SACOG process seemed to reduce this siloing. For example, environmental and rural interests have become more closely aligned through SACOG’s Rural-Urban Connection Strategy, which aims to preserve farmland and improve the connection between the region’s farmers and consumers. The gap between regional planners and equity groups in terms of goals and knowledge was reduced through the HUD process because of the extensive participation process and working groups organized by SACOG. The HUD grant also helped break down silos between SACOG and local community development financial institutions, who may become partners in finding ways to replace the functions of redevelopment. For example, as part of the HUD

grant, the region's affordable housing agency developed a "business plan" for attracting investment in housing development to the transit priority area demonstration projects.

### **Outcomes of Regional Planning and Collaboration**

All of the HUD grant processes in our three case studies will result in tangible outcomes, such as new plans (e.g., in Smart Valley Places), funding mechanisms (e.g., in Sacramento), policies (e.g., in the Bay Area's efforts to preserve affordable housing) and tools (e.g., indices to measure key socio-demographic characteristics, housing affordability and transit proximity). Because of the MPO role in Sacramento and the Bay Area, the process will alter the regional Sustainable Communities Strategy and subsequent investments. In the San Joaquin Valley, the outcomes and recommendations of the FHEA were endorsed by the state's Housing and Community Development Department, which is now requiring each jurisdiction to review the document and recommendations as part of their Housing Element process. Participation in the consortia may also lead to new funding sources. CBOs in the San Joaquin Valley have been able to leverage their participation in Smart Valley Places to seek new funding sources for community engagement activities. In the Bay Area, members of the Joint Projects team are taking the final recommendations to charitable foundations in an effort to maintain the momentum of the Regional Prosperity Plan.

But interviewees in Sacramento, the Bay Area, and the San Joaquin Valley also emphasized the intangible benefits, particularly an improvement in the content and quality of nonprofit actors' communication and joint planning activities with the MPOs. This included increased trust in both directions and increased receptiveness to outside ideas on the part of MPOs. One Sacramento interviewee noted that SACOG "have definitely been influenced by the public participation process. They're responsive to . . . having a regional open space conservation plan, and originally that was sort of a nonstarter." Starting around 2000, the current leadership began "promoting this idea of the blueprint planning, actually having land use, housing, jobs . . . being considered part of a modeling regime for transportation for the region . . . it was an extensive public process. That turned into SB 375 and the idea of Sustainable Communities Strategies and mandating a land use and transportation plan. Fifteen years ago there was no public process and very little consideration of all of these things." In the Bay Area, one interviewee highlighted the Steering Committee discussions as particularly fruitful: "[the] biggest success [of the plan] will be intangible—elected officials sitting next to vocal advocates. . . . For them to have a direct conversation instead of letters in response or public meetings with three minutes each" allowed for "heated and passionate," and ultimately more productive, committee debate. Interviewees commented that regular committee interaction overall has led to solidifying relationships and building trust. "Just by being in the room, we are forming informal partnerships," commented an interviewee. However, in the Bay Area, momentum declined significantly over the multi-year project life, with meeting burnout particularly for participants that were not receiving grants or stipends. Thus, though these new relationships may not result in implementation of this particular project, they may help realize its goals in the future in other venues. In the San Joaquin Valley, numerous interviewees stated that the incorporation of the Community Leadership program into the HUD grant process has shifted cities' perspectives on the value of community engagement, especially the inclusion of low income and marginalized voices. Nevertheless, without external funding, few cities have seemed willing to modify their entrenched planning processes that involve only token engagement.

## Equity

In this section, we test our hypothesis that equity considerations (whether outcome-based or procedural) are often an afterthought to regional planning processes, and that when incorporated, these strategies are coincident to the actual process because of related public programs or requirements.

Equity approaches used by the HUD-SCI grantees generally fall into four different categories demonstrating different aspects of outcome-based and procedural equity (Chapple and Mattiuzzi 2013). Among outcome-based equity measures, *accessibility* approaches focus on spatial access to services and opportunities that in turn shape life chances and the ability to realize one's potential: access to services, to amenities (particularly open space or fresh food), to infrastructure (particularly transit), to fair housing, to education, to jobs, to capital, and to resources generally. *Household budget* approaches focus on outcome-based improvements to basic needs, i.e., the individual household's ability to make ends meet: reducing the cost of living, particularly housing, transportation and energy costs, typically through providing affordable housing or living wage jobs. *Place* approaches address disparities in a particular neighborhood context, either via infill development, typically mixed-use with both jobs and housing, or by improving neighborhood quality, typically through housing and service improvements in existing communities. The theory of equity underlying place approaches is more indirect, albeit still outcome-focused: by increasing densities and improving places, the disadvantaged should be more readily able to meet their basic needs. In the procedural equity category, *Capacity-building* approaches can involve either training disadvantaged individuals to participate in planning processes or supporting community-based organizations that advocate for disadvantaged neighborhoods.

We have found that, far from being an afterthought, social equity has played a central role in the sustainability processes in Sacramento and the Bay Area, though it was less prominent in the San Joaquin Valley. All three regions' applications for the HUD-SCI grant offered a clear theory of how to address outcome-based and procedural equity, including accessibility, household, and place-based strategies (outcome-oriented), and capacity-building (procedural). Although the California regions mentioned almost all these strategies in their applications, they differed in focus. The San Joaquin Valley primarily targeted capacity building for CBOs and residents on issues of planning. In the Bay Area, the grant supported capacity-building (via the multiple grants to CBOs) and household-budget approaches, particularly addressing affordable housing needs and pathways to middle-income jobs. The Sacramento region's SCS married people- and place-based approaches to advance more equitable outcomes, i.e., accessibility to housing and jobs via either improved mobility or construction of affordable housing near transit.

In Sacramento, the HUD grant gave SACOG the opportunity to incorporate greater input on equity into the SCS, both in terms of goals and data collection. After SB 375 passed in 2008, a group of regional equity advocates, environmentalists, and nonprofit housing developers in Sacramento formed the Sustainable Communities Working Group and began meeting monthly to discuss the opportunities for incorporating equity into the law's implementation. Led by CORE, the Coalition on Regional Equity, the Working Group's goal was to demonstrate that building affordable housing near transit in low-income communities reduces greenhouse gas emissions. The working group called on SACOG to balance jobs and housing, promote walkable, compact development, and preserve farmland and open space (CORE 2010). Its priorities also included health monitoring and displacement prevention. The HUD grant gave these advocates a seat at the table for the region's sustainability planning efforts as HUD consortium members, and helped increase their knowledge of transportation planning. According to one interviewee, "a lot

of [advocacy groups] hadn't been engaged in an RTP [Regional Transportation Plan] process before the HUD grant. Having the HUD process happen before the SCS was helpful. It brought people up to speed on how to do regional transportation advocacy. Having the opportunity to go to meetings and work with the SACOG-funded opportunity-vulnerability indices gave everyone an idea of where/what areas could use transit priority areas. That level of analysis wouldn't have been possible if the HUD grant hadn't paid for it."

Data collection for the HUD-SCI grant in the Sacramento region incorporated equity as well. One consortium member, the Center for Regional Change at UC Davis, helped SACOG develop a Neighborhood Opportunity Index and a Social Vulnerability index (Benner and Tithi 2011; Tithi and Benner 2011). The first index is place-based, while the second is people-focused. Both assess housing and jobs relative to population characteristics, including income, race, and education. SACOG has tried to balance increasing affordable housing in low-income neighborhoods where there is existing transit and services with promoting affordable housing in areas with higher opportunity in terms of jobs and better schools, which the Neighborhood Opportunity Index will help them track. Likewise, the Center's Social Vulnerability Index resulted in the incorporation of housing cost burden, single parent households, elderly population, educational attainment, and linguistic isolation into SACOG's Environmental Justice community designation, which previously included only the percentage minority and percentage low-income characteristics of a neighborhood (SACOG 2012, 187). The incorporation of these indicators will provide regional planners with a more nuanced picture of the potential infrastructure needs of an environmental justice neighborhood.

That the Bay Area project was equity-driven is evident through the associated work of the three established tracks, particularly the Equity Collaborative, and the focus on funding CBOs and nongovernmental organizations to engage in pilot projects and regional planning efforts. The approach to equity targeted low- and moderate-income workers, communities of color, and low-income neighborhoods at risk of gentrification and displacement. The funded pilot projects covered accessibility, household budget, capacity building, and place. Most incorporated public participation outreach efforts with a heavy focus on building local capacity as well as community meetings and stakeholder involvement. Despite this central focus on equity in the Prosperity Plan, and the long list of policies it recommended, interviewees noted that the plan largely focuses on the Bay Area's urban core with little attention directed towards the suburbanization of poverty in the outer areas, especially those that experienced numerous housing foreclosures and significant declines in property values in part due to the Great Recession.<sup>6</sup> This gap may have occurred due to the lack of representation from suburban CBOs in projects funded by the three tracks. It also remains to be seen whether the policies and tools that resulted from the projects are implemented and incorporated into the region's next Sustainable Communities Strategy—i.e., entering through the front door.

As noted, the Smart Valley Places equity approach focused on capacity and relationship building to empower local residents to engage in the planning process and improve the relationship between CBOs and local governments. This was to be achieved through the creation of the Community Leadership program, which held leadership institutes in each of the Smart Valley Places cities. The theory of equity behind the Community Leadership program was that, through capacity building, residents and disadvantaged communities would be empowered to participate in planning to shape their own futures, which would enhance the probability of achieving equita-

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<sup>6</sup> In fact, in the Sustainable Communities Strategy, the lack of planning for affordable housing in the suburbs resulted in a lawsuit against MTC from Public Advocates. This was settled out of court.

ble plans and outcomes. The program contracted several regional nonprofits to develop a standardized curriculum that CBOs in each of the cities would then implement.

The HUD grant leaders in the San Joaquin Valley encouraged the CBOs that implemented the leadership institutes to collaborate with city agencies as a means to develop relationships between community groups and city staff. For instance, in Delano and Fresno, city staff delivered some of the institute workshops, increasing exposure and engagement with community residents. One interviewee stated that this process improved the relationships between cities and CBOs, which have typically been antagonistic. This has not been the case in all cities, however, and for the most part there was little to no relationship between the capacity building of residents and the city-led planning efforts being funded by Smart Valley Places. Rather, the instructors assumed that by training residents in the theories and practices of smart growth planning, they would engage in the public process on their own.

This was true in several places, such as Fresno and Merced, where the California Endowment funded community groups to actively participate in city planning processes as part of its Building Healthy Communities Initiative. In other cities, participants in the institutes sought opportunities to join boards and commissions. In most places, however, it was not made explicit how the capacity-building efforts of the Community Leadership institutes would directly influence the city's planning efforts and achieve more equitable outcomes.

Despite the focus on capacity building and community engagement, considerable ambivalence remains over the extent to which equity will be incorporated into decision-making in the San Joaquin Valley. Interviewees noted that Community Leadership program participants often expressed feeling left out and excluded from key decisions, as was the case with the RAI/FHEA as described above. In fact, a number of cities were reluctant to participate in the program, given the explicit treatment of social equity in the NOFA and the need to interact with community groups as part of the grant. As one interviewee stated, "cities in the Valley are afraid of getting residents involved. It was hard to convince them to join because they didn't want to have to deal with 'community' being at the table."

The makeup of the Executive Committee seems to have exacerbated those tensions, at least at the regional level, by underrepresenting Community Leadership participants and ultimately excluding them from any real decision-making processes. Nevertheless, participants, including cities, nearly unanimously agreed during the closing conference that the process had shifted their views on the meaningfulness of community engagement. Finally, the extent to which equity will be advanced through the projects funded by Smart Valley Places remains unclear. Some projects, such as land-use planning, may enhance access or improve places, which could potentially contribute to equity. However, the extent to which equity has been a clearly articulated goal of these activities has been minimal.

In the case of the San Joaquin Valley, the "back door" may indeed be the best way for equity issues to be incorporated into regional sustainability planning. One avenue that HUD opens up towards equity is fair housing; by requiring an analysis of fair housing, HUD is forcing regions to acknowledge barriers to integration, setting the stage for future lawsuits. This same back door indirectly may work for the Bay Area, which, as noted by interviewees, has largely ignored the suburbs in its Prosperity Plan.

## **Concluding Thoughts and Recommendations for Regional Sustainability Planning and Equity**

The case studies presented in this paper examined regional approaches to collaboration and equity in the context of sustainability planning responding to a federal program and a state greenhouse gas emissions reduction target. This article reveals much accomplishment to date, and provides insight into the motivations for collective action (Basolo 2003; Chapin 2012). However, we uncover weaknesses in developing collaboration and supporting equity, due to institutional and program design, among other causes. Drawing from current literature, practice, and our research, we develop the following findings and recommendations for future regional sustainability planning efforts nationally and in California in the context of SB 375.

First, with respect to regional collaboration, processes vary greatly across the U.S., and in our California cases the regional plans were as much about process as product. We found that, as the literature predicts, regional cooperation faces structural challenges, although networks of information sharing, trust, and relationships have increased in all three cases. But collaboration is stronger when consortium partners have a reason to stay at the table and negotiate (as seen in the Bay Area and Sacramento) because dollars are at stake or key decisions are being made. Because the MPO controls funding carrots, its involvement and leadership were key (although power dynamics can intervene, as in the Bay Area case). Thus, tangible and intangible products along these lines have emerged, which lay the groundwork for future planning activities in these regions and support past research on collaborative planning and governance (e.g., Innes and Booher 1999; Innes and Booher 2010).

However, even with optimal levels of collaboration, process, form, and function may breed unintended consequences that deepen existing divisions or create new silos, as is evident in the Bay Area case where planning for affordable housing and economic development are heading down separate tracks. Although HUD selected these three regions for sustainability grants under the auspices of the federal program's implementation track, all three regions have faced barriers to implementation during the grant's time frame. In Sacramento, the core implementation component, the demonstration projects, moved forward on construction of bike-pedestrian and streetscaping improvements but stalled on the affordable housing demonstration project. In the Bay Area, the Prosperity Plan scarcely involved cities; however, their involvement is paramount to the plan's overall long-term effectiveness and implementation, especially for projects needing local planning and project approvals. Further, the regional agencies intended for the plan and SCS to be developed in tandem; yet, the region's first SCS was completed in 2013, and the plan was not completed until 2015, just prior to the official launch of the next SCS planning process.

Second, our research also reveals highly variable regional approaches to procedural and outcome-based equity in practice. Equity may only come in through the back door, e.g., per the requirement for fair housing assessment, in San Joaquin Valley, as its focus has been on capacity building. Equity overall may be disconnected from projects funded through the Smart Valley Places program unless community members participating in the leadership academies develop the capacity to advocate for increased inclusion. However, disproving our equity hypothesis, equity and inclusion are the Bay Area plan's main drivers and in Sacramento, equity issues have been directly integrated into regional sustainability planning efforts and the SCS even with the loss of Redevelopment. Strong MPO/COG participation, coupled with nonprofit organizational capacity, has enabled the adoption of more equitable approaches in these two regions. Given the

range of equity strategies, particularly in the Bay Area, these cases offer a model for SCI grantees across the country.

Thus, when the MPO and/or COG is leading the sustainability planning effort, as in the Bay Area and Sacramento, the process has been more equitable, and perhaps more effective as well. Building from these core findings and current literature, practitioners and funders could employ several strategies in future sustainability planning efforts to overcome challenges, while incorporating equity and enhancing collaboration. We have organized these strategies along process and programmatic lines. We believe they will be applicable to future regional planning efforts, which our research and the literature suggest will likely continue to face similar issues.

With respect to process, planners and consortium partners should build in adequate time before and during collaborative processes to take stock of, and even revisit, historic tensions and institutional structures. To superimpose a planning effort without directly confronting these issues could lead to a resurfacing of past challenges in expected and unanticipated ways throughout the process, particularly in highly fragmented regions. In doing so, full consideration of the key actors and resources needed for implementing tangible products also is critical. This may include: involving implementing agencies such as cities or transit agencies from the onset, or ensuring a diverse mix of projects and funding sources, as funds today may no longer be available tomorrow, at least not in the same form. Both community-based and larger regional nonprofit organizations, as well as affordable housing and economic development planners, should be at the table—a table set not only for information sharing, but also for decision making on policies and even funding distribution. This then can lead to the intangible outcome of trust and relationships solidifying, which may prove fruitful in undergirding subsequent implementation efforts.

A hallmark of sustainability planning is its transcendence of traditional sectoral boundaries. However, our regional cases show that, in practice, process-related challenges still arise from such boundaries. For example, the Bay Area funded numerous projects before the overall Prosperity Plan, with its long-range vision to implement the region's SB 375-mandated SCS, was finalized. San Joaquin Valley's process excluded community organizations from participating in meaningful ways. Thus, while not a new recommendation, project organizers should structure processes so that time also is built in to allow for holistic, integrated visions to emerge *before* decisions are fully made and pilot projects funded.

Along programmatic lines, requirements may beget or strongly influence program direction and form (Pressman and Wildavsky 1984; Ansell and Gash 2008). To the extent feasible, consortium planners should confront and set aside optimism bias with respect to the potential tremendous transactions costs of implementing planning efforts, both for staff and participants (Flyvbjerg 2009; Sclar 2001; Whittington 2012). Consistent with Kwon (2013), participating entities are typically resource challenged, with limited bandwidth to attend meetings.

The “back door” for equity in the form of affordable housing funding seems to be closing, at least temporarily, due to the loss of redevelopment in California coupled with federal cutbacks. Other avenues for equity remain open, in particular, fair housing enforcement at the federal level and possible funding for affordable housing via carbon emission cap-and-trade auction revenues in California. In the absence of this funding, any efforts by the MPOs at incorporating equity remain, at best, palliative.

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