



# Lessons Learned from Statewide Assessments

EXECUTIVE DIRECTORS PEER LEARNING LAB

2012 NADO WASHINGTON POLICY CONFERENCE

MARCH 19, 2012

# *NADO CASE STUDY 1.0*

Congress eliminates the EDA planning grant program and your organization loses its annual EDA planning grant! How would you address the situation? Would you continue focusing on regional planning and economic development? How would you fund your activities? What partnerships and alliances would you pursue?

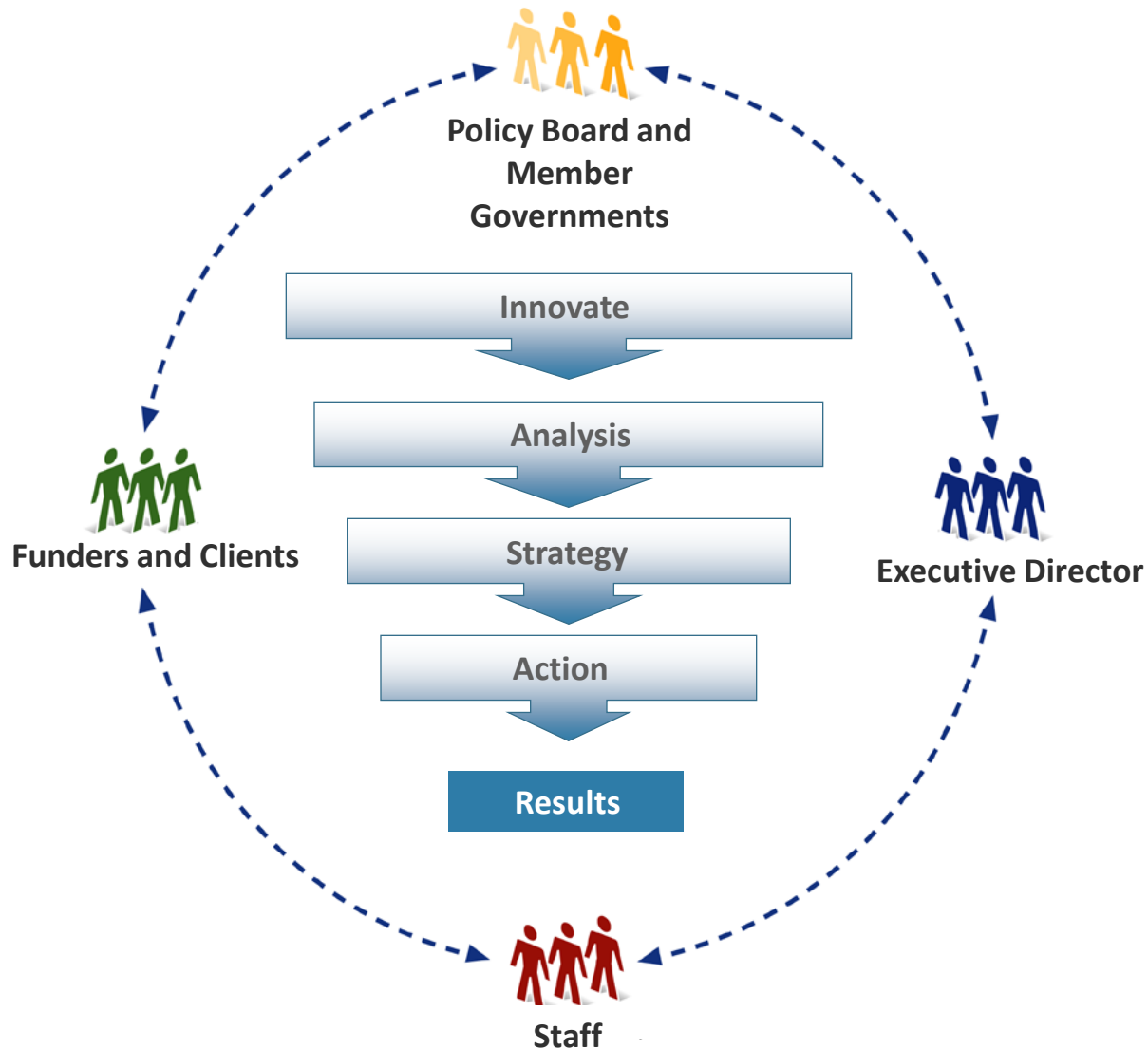
# National Context for RDOs: Federal Policy Landscape

- ◀ Jobs, Jobs & Jobs
- ◀ Federal Debt and Deficits, Plus State & Local Budgets
- ◀ Annual Appropriations Process for FY2013
- ◀ Positioning for 2012 Presidential & Congress Elections

# Realities of the World

- ▶ Federal budget cuts will continue, or at a minimum, stay flat
- ▶ Federal focus on projects of national / regional significance
- ▶ Balance of federal role vs. state-local role vs. private sector
- ▶ RDO and local official relationships with Governors and states really matter in today's political and fiscal climates
- ▶ Local officials need to be educated about their own RDOs

# Fundamentals of RDOs



# Fundamental Design of RDOs

▶ **Our strengths are often our weaknesses, and**  
***our weaknesses are often our strengths***

- Mission and purpose
- Authority (or lack of) and funding streams
- Ownership
- Boundaries

# Fundamentals of RDOs

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- ▶ “Regional councils are sometimes less bold in structure and authority than a region’s needs might warrant, yet more advanced than area politics comfortably accept.”

- James Ray, Texas Association of Regional Councils (1978)

# Fundamentals of RDOs

- ▶ Regional councils are political entities that must function politically to be highly effective, yet they must also act in a non-partisan manner.

- Regional Council Self-Assessment and Resource Toolkit (August 2009)



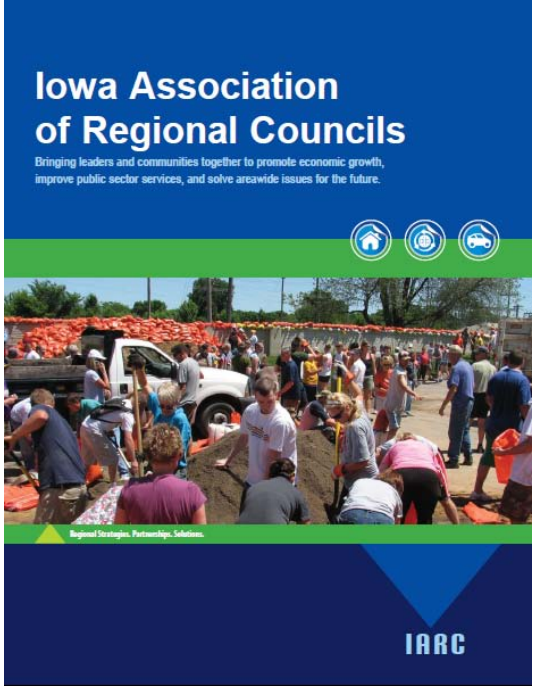
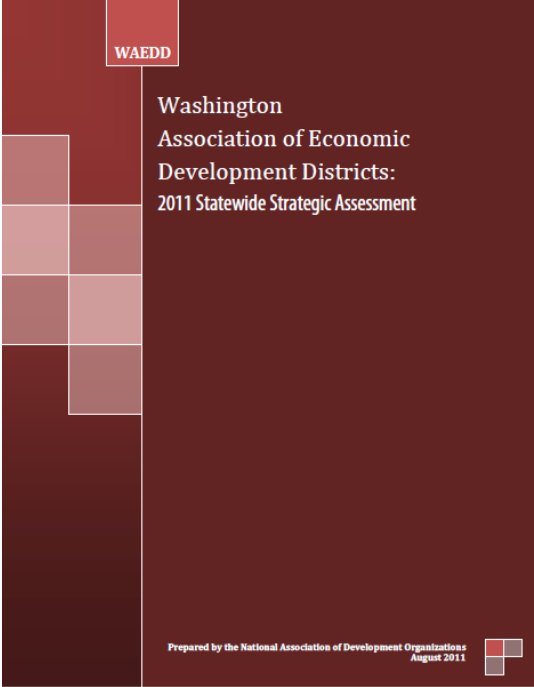
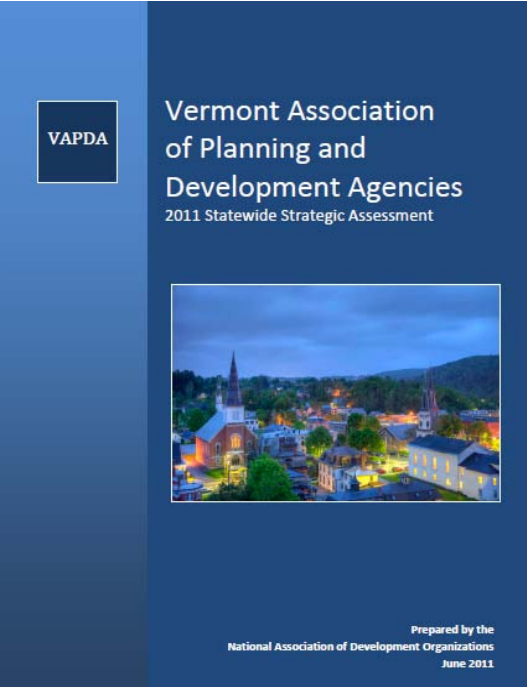
# Fundamental Design of RDOs

- ▶ **How do we leverage our core skills and assets?**
  - **Economies of scale** by pooling resources regionally
  - Results-driven **public entrepreneurs**
  - **Problem solvers** focused on translating strategies into action
  - **Historical / institutional knowledge** of the region, plus mission to facilitate regional and intergovernmental collaboration

# Fundamental Design of RDOs

- ▶ **How do we leverage our core skills and assets?**
  - **Create win-win** for elected officials at state and local levels
  - Focus on **performance and peer accountability**
  - Offer a **pro-active agenda with specific outcomes**
  - ***Be willing to partner with others!***

# Lessons Learned from Recent State Association Projects



# Statewide Assessments: Back to the Basics

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- ▶ **How do your external partners, funders and competitors honestly view your statewide network, as well as individual RDOs within the state?**

# Statewide Assessments: Back to the Basics

- ▶ **What value does your RDO bring to the table?**
  - How are you repositioning your RDO with your *local elected officials*? Do they know they own your RDO?
  - Why should your *Governor* care about partnering with you?
  - Why should your *local EDCs* care about partnering with you?
  - Why should the *private sector* care about partnering with you?

# Statewide Assessments: Back to the Basics

## ▶ If your RDO lost your EDA Economic Development

**District designation**, for example, would you still have a role in economic development within your region?

- Regional and local strategies, including GIS and data analysis
- Infrastructure development
- Access to capital and technical assistance
- Workforce readiness and job skills training

# Statewide Assessments: Executive Summary

- ▶ “There are really very few roadblocks to creating stronger RPCs (i.e. RDOs). It is simple. They just can’t act like lone wolves. And, they need to focus on statewide consistency, have a positive attitude and focus on adding value.”

- Anonymous Quote from VAPDA Statewide Assessment Interviews, January 2011

# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Primary Areas of Strength

- ◀ Professional, dedicated & **apolitical** organizations
- ◀ **Valued link** to local communities
- ◀ **Think long term** about future of regions
- ◀ **Broad knowledge** about regions and local issues
- ◀ Provide **capacity to local communities**,  
especially with management and planning expertise



# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Major Areas of Concern

- ◀ **Inconsistency** of quality, leadership and involvement (*“Some RDOs are invisible!”*)
- ◀ Even when RDOs deliver high quality services statewide, still **unacceptable level of diversity**
- ◀ **Lack of clarity in mission statewide** as needs of state and locals have evolved since founding

# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Major Areas of Concern

- ◀ **Not interested** in making life of funders easier!
- ◀ **Turf battles** with local EDCs and state agencies
- ◀ **Perceived as irrelevant** in some regions
- ◀ **Labeled as only planning and grant management entities**, rather than problem solvers and doers!
- ◀ **Willingness to tackle issues statewide**

# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Major Areas of Concern

- ◀ Some RDOs have become **DISCONNECTED from their local governments** and local elected officials!
- ◀ Some RDOs are **perceived as having a major sense of entitlement**, rather than earn the respect and attention of state and local officials
- ◀ Preach partnerships, **but don't practice themselves!**

# Statewide Assessments: Barriers

## ▶ Too defensive and negative...

- “Hard to convince to play ball, especially with others!”
- “Always whining about administrative and staff costs, plus indirect costs, rather than getting the job done!”
- “Too many lone wolves in the pack. We want to work statewide with the entire team.”

# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Major Areas of Opportunity

- ◀ Provide statewide leadership and strategies on broad range of regional development topics:
  - ◆ Regional innovation and cluster development
  - ◆ Infrastructure inventories and strategies
  - ◆ Broadband as economic development tool
  - ◆ Emergency management preparedness
  - ◆ Social services mapping (i.e. substance abuse, affordable housing, social services, mental health, etc)

# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Major Areas of Opportunity

- ◀ Forums for stronger state interagency collaboration, especially with intergovernmental connections
- ◀ Implement key action items developed by statewide forums and study commissions
- ◀ Address perceived weaknesses of RDO policy boards
- ◀ Improve branding and awareness of RDOs (*i.e. Not another layer of government supported by tax money!*)

# Statewide Assessments: Key Findings

## ■ Major Areas of Opportunity

- ◀ Put forth pro-active policy and program agenda
- ◀ Sharpen branding beyond just planning and grants
  - ◆ How you translate strategies into action!
- ◀ Tackle issue of peer accountability ***and tout it!***
- ◀ Establish an image of professional, credible organizations
- ◀ Share resources and staff across RDO boundaries – and tout it, ***especially with federal and state officials***

# Next Steps

- ▶ Clearly define statewide priorities and policies **internally**
- ▶ Clearly define and communicate value to the **external world**
  - *Take control of your message, otherwise you are defined by others*
- ▶ Agree to focus on **peer accountability and performance**,  
including executive directors ***and senior professional staff***
- ▶ Build on **unique and shared assets and skills** of your network



# Next Steps: National Trends and Innovations

- **Face common** needs, challenges and issues
- **Improve** consistency, quality and delivery of services
- **Develop new partnerships**, programs and funding
- **Share best** practices, peer exchanges and test ideas
- **Practice what we preach** about working across jurisdictional boundaries and overcoming turf wars

# Next Steps: National Trends and Innovations

- **Message:** We are problem solvers!
- **Attitude:** We'll work out details later, we're ready to roll!
- **Partnerships:** We're ready to partner. We're not turf fighters.
- **Accountability:** We'll self-police & hold each other accountable.
- **Quality:** We'll deliver a consistent, high quality product.

***We understand status quo is NOT an option!  
We know money is tight so we want to leverage existing  
resources and focus on performance-driven results.***

Regional councils are knowledge-based firms.

Presentation of data, concepts and ideas are our lifeblood.

We are driven by ideas, innovations, solutions and results.

Fundamentals of RDOs

# NADO CASE STUDY 2.0

The state is broke and laying off workers. Your local officials are struggling financially, yet are facing mandates, job losses and plant closures. You're facing a hostile, divided state legislature and the Governor has never heard of you or your organization. And, you have almost a totally new policy board. Yet, you still have contacts with state agencies and your organization could be a major asset for state and local officials, regardless of their political party.

***How you do approach this situation?***

# State Association Case Studies



# Alabama CEDS

COMPREHENSIVE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

[Home](#)[Planning Process](#)[Economic Situation](#)[Analysis](#)[Vision](#)[Promotion](#)[Projects](#)[Measurements](#)

This report constitutes the Alabama Consolidated Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy of the Alabama Association of Regional Councils and the twelve Regional Councils that serve the communities of the State of Alabama.

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The Alabama Consolidated Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy is funded by a

# Kentucky State Association Model

- ▶ Council of ADD Policy Board Members
- ▶ Executive Directors Association
- ▶ Executive Director Teams Assigned to Each Cabinet Agency, Along with Staff-Level Working Groups for Each Agency / Project
- ▶ Transition Teams for New Administration
- ▶ Full-time Executive Director

# New Mexico Association of Regional Councils

- ▶ Regular Monthly Meetings
- ▶ Statewide Impact Report
- ▶ Visits with Key State Agencies & Legislators
- ▶ Peer Accountability and Mentoring
- ▶ Program Accountability and Statewide Delivery



# NC TOMORROW

A Collaborative for Sustainable Economic Growth



NORTH CAROLINA



HUD.GOV

U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development



Providing software solutions since 1976

# NADO CASE STUDY 3.0

You're a new executive director replacing the organization's original director – someone who was in place 43 years! Unfortunately, not much has been happening for the past 10 years and new regional organizations and consultants have assumed many of your RDO's traditional roles. ***How do you go about rebuilding your brand, programs and resources?***

# *NADO CASE STUDY 4.0*

It is election season and the Governor's race is a run-away contest for a popular former White House official. He's been influenced by national think tanks who tout regional economic development strategies and innovation as the next best thing! The Governor-elect is now planning to form new Regional Councils to develop CEDS, bring together public and private sector leaders, and foster regional economic innovation and competitiveness. How do you respond?

# NADO CASE STUDY 5.0

It is your first day on the job. Congratulations! Except no one told you about the \$200,000 RLF default, morale and attendance problems with the staff, and the total absence of the policy board. BUT, your region is suffering from severe unemployment, your group has potential, and personally, you want to make a real difference. *How do you start?*



**National Association of Development Organizations (NADO)  
and the NADO Research Foundation**

**400 North Capitol Street, NW | Suite 390 | Washington, DC 20001**

**NADO.org**

**Ruraltransportation.org | Knowyourregion.org | Regionalcouncilguide.org**

**202.624.7806 | Info@nado.org**

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