Partnership for Sustainable Communities
2013-2014 Regional Roundtables Summary

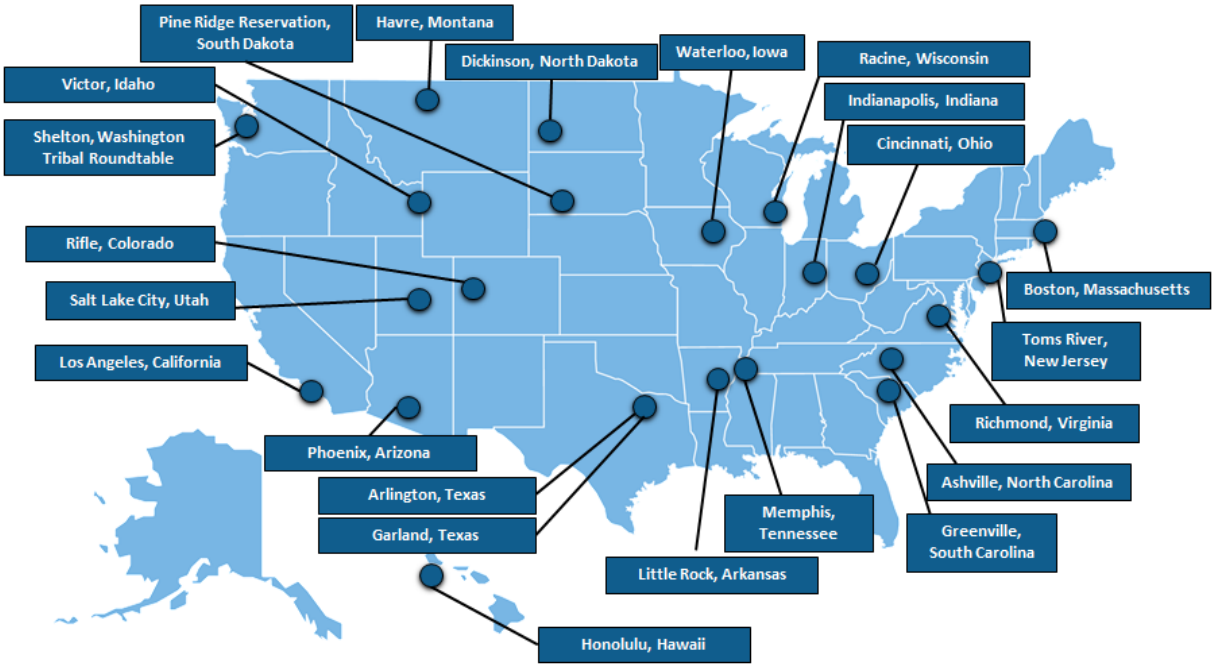
Partnership for Sustainable Communities Roundtable Discussions

Guided by six livability principles (see inset box), the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), U.S. Department of Transportation (DOT), and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) are coordinating investments and aligning policies to help expand opportunity for American communities. In 2013 and 2014, the Partnership for Sustainable Communities (PSC) held a series of roundtable discussions with communities across the country to learn how best to support communities in achieving their visions for the future. Hundreds of Federal, State and local government officials, tribes, business leaders, nonprofits, neighborhood associations, Metropolitan Planning Organizations, philanthropic partners, community representatives, and members of the public came together in 22 Roundtable meetings to jump start local projects and to let Federal agencies know how they can best support communities.

Partnership for Sustainable Communities Principles:

- Provide more transportation choices
- Promote equitable, affordable housing
- Enhance economic competitiveness
- Support existing communities
- Coordinate and leverage Federal policies and investment
- Value communities and neighborhoods

Locations of Roundtables



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What We Heard

We need to get sustainability 'hardwired' into our core programs, such as through rulemaking and grant sourcing.

Businesses looking for 'young talent' look for amenities like bike paths.

The private and public sector will need to work together to address ongoing challenges.

There is an ongoing need for the Federal government to invest in coordinated, place-based collaborations.

The PSC should be helping to make sure that development is ready for the climate of the next 100 years, not what the past looked like.

Agencies should learn more about the needs of rural communities by supporting research and pilot projects rather than attempting to apply urban concepts to rural places.

An important challenge moving forward will be to help suburban areas develop sustainably as they urbanize over the next 10-20 years.

In addition to investing in resilient infrastructure, the Partnership should be helping communities build 'social capital' within neighborhoods, assisting them in engaging with community residents.

Summary Statistics

- 23 PSC roundtables in 22 states
- 11 Federal agencies represented
- Around 740 total participants, including State, county, and local governments; elected officials; nonprofits; neighborhood associations; Metropolitan Planning Organizations; tribal nations; universities; faith-based organizations; business development districts; and other private sector representatives

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Key Themes

Multifaceted benefits of a single project or investment: Roundtable participants noted the importance of getting the most value out of every Federal and local dollar spent. Through "complete streets" projects, for example, communities can improve walking and biking access between homes, jobs, and schools while also increasing the use of green infrastructure to help manage stormwater. In Indianapolis, the Washington Street Cultural Trail to the Indianapolis Arts Garden has increased walkability and transportation choice while also stimulating increased economic and business growth.

The value of making collaborative, interagency approaches the new way of doing business: Federal agencies should continue their efforts to streamline and harmonize requirements and regulations. Some local leaders pointed out that communities, especially small and rural ones, face barriers in securing matching funds for Federal grants, and urged Federal agencies to consider broadening the types of investments that may be considered a "match" for Federal project funding.

Broadening outreach: Participants noted the importance of overcoming language, cultural and other obstacles to increase public participation and involvement in community efforts.

Rural communities: Smaller and rural communities discussed the need to support projects specifically designed for rural communities.

Embedding sustainability into core functions: Stakeholders emphasized the importance of institutionalizing livability and sustainability in all programs – making it the new "business as usual." Institutionalizing this work in the face of inevitable staff turnover requires ongoing relationship-building.

Using public-private partnerships: Participants noted that the public and private sectors will need to work together to address ongoing community challenges. By engaging the private sector, the public sector can more effectively catalyze redevelopment, create jobs, and improve transportation choices.

Connecting and improving data sources and tools: Federal agencies can help improve local planning capacity by providing training on tools and data sources, and by helping to explain which tools are most effective for which purposes. Several participants noted their interest in improving analytical methods to better understand the relationship between transportation and land use. Stakeholders reported that there is insufficient funding for data collection at the local and State levels and a need for better data.

Next Steps

Using the feedback received at the roundtables, the Partnership is focusing its future activities around the following key issues:

- Advancing Economic Opportunity and Mobility
- Helping Communities Adapt to a Changing Climate, while Mitigating Future Disaster Losses
- Supporting the Next Stage of Implementation of the Partnership's Community Investments

Local, State, and Federal stakeholders discuss opportunities for sustainable downtown redevelopment during an interactive breakout session of the PSC roundtable in Toms River, NJ. Photo credit: Erika Stahl.

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