

CRCOG Stakeholder Report, Staff Retreat, Policy Board Visioning Session, and Survey Executive Summary

Stakeholder Process Overview

Between April 20 and May 17, 2023, Grossman Solutions conducted stakeholder interviews with 10 CRCOG staff members and 18 additional outside stakeholders, including members of the Policy Board, elected officials, and external partners from municipal, state, and federal government offices and other related organizations. An additional 17 staff members completed a stakeholder survey.

The purpose of the stakeholder interviews was 1) to better understand the internal, external, and political landscape, challenges, and opportunities facing CRCOG in order to draft a strategic vision document, and 2) design an effective staff retreat for CRCOG's team to explore, articulate, and define their mission, values, and strategic vision.

Top Findings

The stakeholder process surfaced key areas of alignment around the core strengths of CRCOG and the challenges facing it. The CRCOG team is highly regarded for their professional expertise, non-partisan ability to build consensus among the 38 member towns of CRCOG, and their impactful transportation and regional planning and municipal shared services work.

Challenge areas arise primarily from Connecticut's particular tradition of "home rule" and the wariness of elected officials and local government staff to adopt a regional approach to municipal services. However, most stakeholders identified multiple examples where CRCOG is already highly effective and new potential projects that would help the 38 towns and cities best serve their nearly 1 million residents.

- Overall, CRCOG staff are very positive about the culture inside CRCOG and their work for the organization and there is broad overall alignment on current mission and priorities. Some silos exist inside the organization, but staff describe recent efforts to improve communication across departments.
- Most outside stakeholders, especially elected officials, have an incomplete understanding of the totality of CRCOG's roles and responsibilities.
- The majority of outside stakeholders described the looming crisis for the region's towns and cities to continue to provide municipal services in the face of cost and workforce issues.
- Workforce recruitment and retention were a top issue across most stakeholder conversations.

Based on the stakeholder interviews and surveys, CRCOG is uniquely positioned by virtue of its reputation, expertise, and non-partisan status to further advance the conversation around shared services and add a new slate of priorities.

Opportunities

- Highly positive reputation positions CRCOG as a thought-leader.

- CRCOG's strength as a convener and facilitator were noted by stakeholders across the board.
- CRCOG's non-partisan role is a key positive in an era of heightened partisanship.
- CRCOG has the potential to enhance its role as an information clearinghouse and best practices resource.

Challenges

- Home-rule and the fear of regionalization are two powerful factors that influence CRCOG's work.
- Answering the disparate needs of small towns, suburbs, and cities and finding projects that address all member communities remains a core challenge.
- CRCOG needs to better communicate to its members what it does.
- CRCOG is not well-known by the public.
- Outside stakeholders and staff are not fully aligned on CRCOG's role and impact.
- CRCOG will need to build consensus among its members around its focus going forward.

Staff Retreat Overview

On May 25th, the CRCOG staff convened for a day-long staff retreat at Crandall Lake in Tolland, CT. Grossman Solutions designed a program of exercises and conversations to address the goals set by the CRCOG leadership. Staff discussed their views about the mission, values, and strategic vision for the organization. Additionally, based on the finding in the stakeholder process that many staff members did not know about the work of other departments, Pauline Yoder presented a summary of CRCOG's core functions and plans to educate the team and help facilitate inter-departmental conversations. Finally, Matt Hart presented a framework for the staff to use to evaluate potential projects and priorities, which initiated a final conversation about the direction of CRCOG's work for future. The retreat was a productive day where staff members articulated the building blocks of mission and values statements, brainstormed impactful project ideas, and deepened connections across the team.

Policy Board Visioning Meeting

Members of CRCOG's Policy Board met on June 12 for a strategic visioning retreat. Policy Board members and other attendees were briefed about the findings from the stakeholder process and staff retreat and reviewed the proposed strategic priorities prepared by the leadership team. During the discussion and in their written comments, the participants weighed in on CRCOG's proposed priorities.

The members' ranking of the priorities elevated Regional Housing Strategy, Public Sector Workforce and Regional Waste and Stormwater Management (with an emphasis on Waste Management) as their top three priorities.

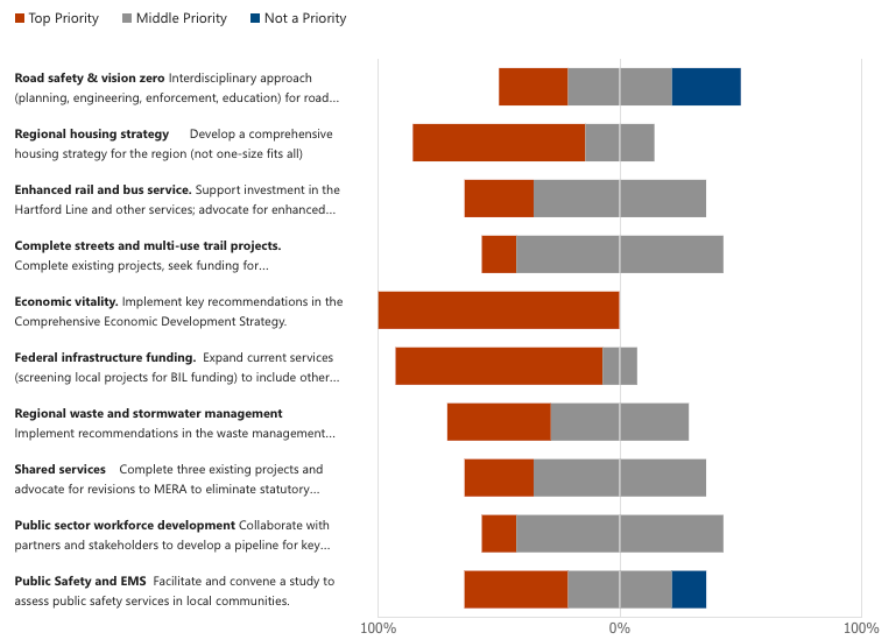
Priority	High Priority Vote Total	Medium Priority Vote	Lower Priority Vote
Regional Housing Strategy	9	3	0
Public Sector Workforce	9	3	0
Regional Waste and Stormwater Management	9	3	2
Federal Infrastructure Funding	8	3	0

Shared Services	7	4	0
Enhanced Rail and Bus Service	6	6	0
Complete Streets and Multi-Use Trail Projects	5	2	3
Road Safety and Vision Zero	4	5	2
Economic Vitality	4	5	1
Public Safety and EMS	2	6	4

Throughout the Policy Board meeting, members highlighted CRCOG's role as a convener, facilitator, non-partisan data and analytics provider, and resource for best practices and policy recommendations. There was also consensus on the suggestion from Board Chair Mayor Erin Stewart to hold a quarterly in-depth policy discussion, focused on a single area of public policy representing an existing or emerging high-level need to the members. Additionally, many meeting participants also highlighted CRCOG's need to communicate what it does with elected officials, municipal employees, and the public.

CRCOG Policy Board Survey

Policy Board members and alternates who did not attend the visioning session were sent a survey offering them the opportunity to comment on the topics discussed and rank their strategic policy priorities. The following graphic illustrates how the 17 respondents to the survey ranked the proposed policy areas.



Between the Policy Board visioning session and the survey, about two-thirds of the region's members participated in the strategic planning process. Their input and insights are reflected throughout the Strategic Playbook.

CRCOG Staff Retreat Photos
Crandall Lake, Tolland, CT – May 25, 2023



“Gravity Stick” Icebreaker Activity



CRCOG Staff