

Capacity Building to Support Sustainable Local Economic Development in Canadian Municipalities

for the



FEDERATION
OF CANADIAN
MUNICIPALITIES

FÉDÉRATION
CANADIENNE DES
MUNICIPALITÉS



Federation of Canadian Municipalities and the Economic Developers Association of Canada

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and



GRANT CONSULTING
SUSTAINABILITY one step at a time

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1 Introduction

The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM), in collaboration with the Economic Developers Association of Canada (EDAC), has recently been investigating the extent to which sustainability considerations are being integrated into local economic development initiatives in Canada. A high level survey was conducted in the Fall of 2011 which assessed EDAC members' activities, needs, and interests in integrating social and environmental benefits into their local economic development strategies and projects. In addition, research was completed by McSweeney & Associates and an overview document was developed in March 2012 on the trends and best practices in sustainable economic development that could serve as examples for municipalities.

As a next step, a focus group on Sustainable Economic Development was held in Ottawa, Canada, on March 28, 2012. Canadian champions of sustainable local economic development were brought together to candidly discuss the tools and approaches that are most likely to support meaningful capacity building and peer-to-peer networking and idea exchange.

A total of 22 participants from across Canada attended the one-day focus group session. Please see **Appendix A** for a list of participants.

2 Synthesis of the Views of Focus Group Participants

During the focus group meeting, participants were asked to consider three foundational questions and to consider solutions. Working in three groups, each with a facilitator, participants discussed each question and their views were documented in point form. Their answers provide considerable insight into the current state of affairs and into future actions that can be taken to help move towards the better integration of economic development and community sustainability.

In this section of the report the project team has created a synthesis of the comments provided by the participants. The point form responses are included as **Appendix B**.

2.1 Barriers to Integration

What are the barriers to integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development?

The first, and in many ways the most surprising barrier identified, is a lack of awareness and understanding of the concept of sustainability. A number of participants identified a need for a definition of sustainability that can be used to facilitate future integration or alignment. This is surprising because the term sustainable development has been used for 25 years dating back to the publication of *Our Common Future*, the final report of the World Commission on Environment and Development. However, having a common understanding and shared language are two of the most important initial steps that can be taken when

undertaking a sustainable planning exercise. Therefore it makes sense to address this perceived barrier head-on so that the more important work of building plans and specifying actions can take place.

Another barrier which is common in both the public and private sector is the fact that sustainability, as a longer-term goal, is often considered only after short-term priorities are met. In the corporate world goals such as maximizing shareholder value and consistently achieving quarterly profits make it hard to think long-term. So it is safe to say that economic developers, more than sustainability coordinators or other municipal employees, will need to be able to demonstrate the value proposition of sustainability in a way that is meaningful to businesses.

Barriers related to the connection with the community were also identified. A few participants noted a lack of community champions in their municipalities, while others indicated that there is a need to sell the concept of sustainability to the organization and the community as a whole. In addition they noted the need to obtain stakeholder alignment and buy-in from all parties. These comments suggest that there is a need not only to clarify the definition of sustainability, but to work with community members and local businesses to establish priorities and to identify benefits in tangible ways. The benefits need to speak to existing businesses, perspective investors and entrepreneurs, and to taxpayers concerned about the bottom line.

Demonstrating benefits is also important because participants identified the lack of municipal financial resources to assign to sustainable economic development initiatives as a barrier. As communities wrestle with the process of identifying priorities in the face of lean municipal budgets, understanding the benefits of adopting practices that are more sustainable will be essential. Closely related is the need to define metrics to measure the success of the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development.

Finally, some participants noted that it is sometimes difficult to assign roles and responsibilities in order to ensure tasks are completed in a timely fashion during implementation. A related barrier is the lack of communication between “silos” – both within organizations and between organizations - which minimizes opportunities for integration and creates duplication. However, in our review of best practices we noted close cooperation between economic development offices and those responsible for the sustainability plan. In fact, in some cases, both responsibilities fall within the same organizational unit, as is the case in Pickering.

2.2 What is Working Well Now?

What is working well now with regards to the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development?

Participants were also asked to identify examples of programs, initiatives or processes that are supporting the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development.

Participants noted that “green” economic opportunities are in most of the economic development plans completed recently. This suggests that building the bridge to an understanding of sustainability and demonstrating the benefits of sustainability may be relatively easy to achieve by building on green examples and working to expand the overall understanding of how economic development can support other sustainability objectives.

Surrey and Vancouver have integrated green and technology hubs into their sustainability plans. The idea of hubs supports many sustainability objectives beyond traditional success measures such as job creation. They also can reduce commuting, enhance community partnerships, revitalize downtown areas in smaller communities, contribute to youth retention and make communities more attractive.

Portland, Oregon has a Clean Energy Works program to complete energy retrofits of homes. It creates local jobs in the green economy and helps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and the energy footprint of the community. In addition to being a driver of economic development on a local scale, it also provides social benefits connected to community revitalization and developing or redeveloping a sense of place. More information can be found at <http://www.cleanenergyworksoregon.org>.

Nunavut has a similar program to Portland in place. More information on their program can be found at <http://cgs.gov.nu.ca/en/energy-services>. In addition, some communities in Nunavut are taking ownership of their economic development plans and making important strides forward.

In Mali, in a project managed by the FCM, they use Roundtable for implementation where the government businesses and other community leaders meet on a monthly basis to review progress. This provides all parties with a way to meet on a regular basis to align their goals and objectives. More information on the Mali project can be found at: <http://www.fcm.ca/home/programs/international/municipal-partners-for-economic-development/mali.htm>.

In Ontario, the *Place to Grow Act* has forced a change in thinking that has resulted in densification and reinvestment in urban cores that had previously become rundown. Most communities within the affected area, known as the Greater Golden Horseshoe, have adopted Growth Plans which also affect local economic development. More information can be found at: <https://www.placestogrow.ca>.

The *Green Energy Act* in Ontario has created jobs in manufacturing that help to replace the jobs that have been lost, especially in the automotive sector. More information can be found at: <http://www.energy.gov.on.ca/en/fit-and-microfit-program/2-year-fit-review>.

In Peterborough, General Electric was able to convert a manufacturing line over to creating wind turbine components. This has allowed that factory to expand into a new and growing sector. This was done with help from the provincial government. More information can be found at: <http://www.renewableenergyfocus.com/view/6275/ontario-invests-in-general-electric-canada-s-motor-production-facility>.

In Stratford, PEI, a town with a population of about 9,000, they were able to increase their response rate for surveys from residents and businesses on economic development criteria from 5% to 20% after including sustainability as one of their topics. Stratford also has a Sustainable Economic Development Officer, a step which drives integration.

Green building is another area where economic development has a role to play. Programs such as LEED (Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design) award points for a wide range of green economy services and the use of greener products or products that are manufactured locally. In Seattle, Portland and Denver, they are developing initiatives in their local economic development plans to support businesses that can meet this increased demand.

Specific kinds of programs are also working well. For example, the development of community gardens, the enhancement of recycling programs, integration of new technology into buildings and offices, and demand for green buildings support community economic development and sustainability.

The participants also noted that the following factors have contributed positively to integrating economic development and sustainability:

- Government funding and Federation of Canadian Municipalities Funding makes projects happen;
- Lessons learned from the experiences of others;
- Collaboration with others - community partners, youth groups, other levels of government;
- The concept of sustainability is being integrated into many master planning documents; and
- People want to be sustainable – they support completing actions that contribute.

2.3 What Would Success Look Like?

What would success in the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development look like?

Participants were asked to describe success – to define economic development that supports integration or alignment with sustainability – in terms of solutions like programs, initiatives or processes.

Success can be defined as a community where partners such as businesses, organizations and government participate with citizens in a process to create a vision of sustainability that describes what it means in a local context. That process would engage a wide variety of participants and create the conditions for buy-in and support from the Mayor and Council. This vision and local meaning would then attract strong local champions who would spearhead the implementation of sustainability and the ongoing integration of economic development within the broader vision.

The process of creating a community vision would ensure that the concept of sustainability has been depoliticized and would begin the process of embedding it into the lifestyle and

culture of the community, its businesses and its residents. This in turn would attract new, sustainable businesses to the area. It would also make the community vibrant – a great place to live, work and play that becomes a magnet for immigrants in part because of its successful programs to welcome and integrate newcomers.

Success would also mean being able to communicate the benefits of sustainability and its value to businesses, organizations, residents in the community as a whole. This would include sharing the business case for sustainability, having measurable targets identified and reporting to the public on a regular basis. The number of jobs created in the community would need to be included in the measurement of success.

Community sustainability would be further supported by a process where all municipal decisions, reports and plans demonstrate alignment to sustainability in writing as part of the documentation submitted to Council. This process, along with a common vision, would allow the Mayor and Council to defend their decisions that support sustainability. This would lead to the adoption of policies that would educate and inform community members, before enforcement is applied.

2.4 Considering Potential Solutions

The project team reviewed participant responses to the three foundational questions and selected six areas where potential solutions could be further explored. The emphasis was on identifying tools, training or other capacity building activities that would support EDOs, sustainability coordinators and/or municipal staff to integrate or align economic development and sustainability.

The following solutions were explored using a World Café format. Detailed participant results are included as **Appendix C**.

Table 1

- **Round 1** – Definition of sustainability
- **Round 2** – Policy creation/mandate/alignment of Official Plan (Official Community Plan/Municipal Development Plan)

Table 2

- **Round 1** – Education of Council
- **Round 2** – Education of Economic Development Officers and Sustainable Development Coordinators

Table 3

- **Round 1** – Finding local champions
- **Round 2** – Building/sharing the business case

3 Recommendations

After the project team completed the investigation of potential solutions, a total of five final solutions were mapped out. Detailed participant results are included as **Appendix C**. However, it was decided that the two best options for action should be put forward as recommendations.

The focus group discussions identified two main areas of weakness with respect to the integration of sustainability and economic development: a lack of a common understanding of the concept of sustainability, and a lack of education and communication with regards to the concept and its benefits in a municipal scenario. As such, following are two closely related recommendations to increase the capacity to support sustainable local economic development:

1. **Create a "Road Map for Defining Local Economic Sustainability".**

It is anticipated that this would be core documentation that will be expanded into a conference presentation, webinar, seminar, and/or component of economic development professional development. It would include the following:

- Demonstration of the value of having a local definition of sustainability that all community partners can use that includes economic development.
- A brief overview of the most common definitions of sustainability and local economic sustainability, and an exploration of the challenge in finding acceptable definitions.
- A suggested step by step process for developing a local definition.
- Tools that can be used to ensure that the public and key stakeholders are involved in the process and therefore buy-in to the final outcome, as well as tools to ensure that the Mayor and other community 'movers and shakers' are on board with the process, participate and support the outcome. The exact tools to be developed would be decided upon and developed by each specific community, however examples include slide presentations and website pages dedicated to sustainable economic development and its benefits (i.e. on the FCM/EDAC websites).
- A list of resources that can be used to demonstrate the benefits of sustainability with a focus on business planning: creating a business case, identifying paybacks, and identifying other potential benefits such as expanding into new markets, improving existing products and services, and creating new products.
- A list of ways to use the local definition and business planning materials – for training, communications, alignment of plans, securing grants and funds and so forth.

2. **Develop materials to facilitate communication of the concept of Local Economic Sustainability to all stakeholders, as well as educate them on the subject.**

Having a common set of materials will assist in developing a common understanding of the concept of local economic sustainability across all municipal and economic development organizations in Canada. This will also assist with the communication of the

value proposition for local economic sustainability – the fact that economic sustainability is critical to the support of the other pillars of sustainability and provides the financial resources and community/municipal wealth needed to support ongoing overall sustainability in the community. There are two distinct target audiences with different needs: Council and the community (at a high-level), and economic development and sustainability practitioners (at a more detailed level). The following materials are recommended:

- Presentations should be developed for both audiences to be used at conferences and seminars to communicate a consistent message to all stakeholders. This would include a visual representation of local economic sustainability in relation to community development and sustainability.
- An online forum/community of practice that would house all relevant materials/resources in one place. This online resource could include discussion groups and an inventory of relevant case studies. It would also provide invaluable networking capabilities with peers working in sustainable economic development.
- A dedicated EDAC LinkedIn discussion group dedicated to sustainable economic development.
- A set of relevant case studies in local economic sustainability from large and small municipalities, rural and urban. Each would consist of a one page executive summary, and a more detailed case study. Some topic suggestions are: the successful alignment of economic development and sustainability in a municipal context; a case study on how to incorporate sustainable economic development into the Official Plan and economic development strategy; case studies on embedding sustainability into the municipal culture; case studies of successful sustainable economic development projects; case studies illustrating financial viability and return on investment.

4 Next Steps

The following next steps are recommended to advance this initiative:

Preparation

The following preparation steps should take place in the next eight weeks.

1. Circulate this report to all project participants (interviewees, focus group participants, EDAC).
2. Review the recommendations contained within this report with EDAC and agree on next steps.
3. Implement recommendations 1 and 2.
4. Identify two champions – one from FCM, the other from EDAC – who will be responsible for spearheading the implementation of next steps.

Involvement of Economic Development Groups

The identified champions¹ will then work to further advance this initiative on the economic development front.

5. Identify opportunities with EDAC such as:
 - An EDAC-sponsored webinar;
 - Pre-conference or other seminar;
 - Newsletter communications;
 - A dedicated webpage;
 - The development of a new EDAC award for the successful integration of sustainability and economic development in a municipality.
6. Identify opportunities with provincial economic development associations for seminars and training; and
7. Develop new ideas as to how this initiative could be further advanced and implement them.

Promotion

The identified champions will work to promote this initiative on the municipal front.

8. Target FCM, regional and provincial municipal associations across Canada in order to deliver seminars or conference presentations on successful sustainable economic development that is a model for other communities.
9. Write an article in Municipal World profiling this initiative and the concept of local economic sustainability.

¹ A small task force could be formed to assist the two champions.

Appendix A – List of Participants

Name	Title	Organization
Carlos Salazar	Manager of Community Planning and Design	Municipality of Clarington, ON
Dan Gillis	Executive Director	Guysborough County Regional Development Authority, NS
Dany Robidoux	Coordinator - Knowledge-Based Economy	Conseil de développement économique des municipalités bilingues du Manitoba (CDEM), MB
David Oakes	Director of Economic Development and Tourism Services	City of St. Catharines, ON
David Paul	Director, Economic Development	City of Brockville, ON
Donna Chiarelli	Manager, Capacity Building Programs	FCM
Douglas Deacon	Sustainable Economic Development Coordinator	Town of Stratford, ON
Edith Gingras	Program Manager, MPED Africa, FCM International	FCM
Greg Borduas	Secretary / Chief Administrative Officer	EDAC / Thames Centre, ON
Ian Scott	Economic Development Officer	City of Ottawa, ON
Jay Amer	President / President	EDAC / Amer & Associates Economic Development
Jeca Glor-Bell	Program Officer, Capacity Building	FCM
Joel Lemoine	Financial Business Advisor	Economic Development Council for Bilingual Municipalities of Manitoba (CDEM), MB
Keith Brooks	Program Manager, Blue Green Canada	Environmental Defence, ON
Manny Deol	Chief Administrative Officer	Town of Drayton Valley, AB
Mark Morrissey	Executive Director	Nunavut Economic Development Association (NEDA), NU
Penny Gardiner	Chief Executive Officer	EDAC

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Name	Title	Organization
Robyn Webb	Director, Business Retention and Expansion & Labour Market Development	Greater Halifax Partnership
Russ McPherson	Project Manager	WaterWolf Planning Commission, SK
Sandy Blue	Manager Strategic Economic Initiatives	Invest Maple Ridge / District of Maple Ridge, BC
Stephanie Bohdanow	Program Officer, Capacity Building	FCM
Tom Monastyrski	Program Manager, MPED Ukraine, FCM International	FCM

Appendix B – Summary of Participant Input

Barriers to Integration

What are the barriers to integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development?

The key barriers to the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development that were identified included:

- Sustainability, as a longer-term goal, is often considered only after short-term priorities are dealt with;
- The difficulty of assigning roles and responsibilities during implementation;
- A lack of municipal financial resources to assign to sustainable economic development;
- A lack of awareness and understanding of the concept of sustainability;
- A lack of community champions;
- Obtaining stakeholder alignment and developing a plan that will obtain buy-in from all parties;
- Selling the concept of sustainability to the organization and the community;
- The difficulty in defining metrics to measure the success of the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development; and
- A lack of communication and/or silos of thinking both within organizations and between organizations.

What is Working Well Now?

What is working well now with regards to the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development?

The following were identified as practices that are working well now in communities to facilitate the integration of sustainability and economic development:

- Collaboration and networking amongst stakeholders;
- Government funding/incentives for sustainable initiatives which allows projects to come to fruition;
- Having strong leadership/champions to guide the process;
- Educating/communicating with stakeholders with regards to sustainability;
- Celebrating success stories to promote sustainability in the community;
- Learning from best practices and the experiences of others;
- Making sustainability a part of the organizational culture and engraining the concept into everyday life/business;
- Partnering with educational institutions;
- Aligning municipal plans with the concept of sustainability; and
- Undertaking specific sustainability projects or programs, such as recycling or community gardens.

What Would Success Look Like?

What would success in the integration or alignment of sustainability and economic development look like?

The following were identified as signs that the integration of sustainability and economic development has been successful:

- Having measurable targets identified and being able to meet them;
- Meaningful employment is being created in the community;
- The concept of sustainability has been depoliticized, is engrained in the lifestyle/culture, and is now how life/business is conducted every day;
- Sustainable businesses are being attracted to or developed in the community;
- The concept that “one man’s trash is another’s input” is being applied in the community (i.e. eco-industrial park);
- All municipal decisions and reports/plans demonstrate alignment to sustainability;
- Politicians are able to defend their decisions with regards to sustainability;
- The community participates, is engaged, and buys into the process;
- There is a common understanding of what sustainability means;
- Strong local champions are spearheading the implementation of sustainability; and
- Policies are used to educate and inform, before enforcement is applied

Appendix C – Summary of Participant Solutions

This section presents the focus group's brainstorming solutions to addressing the common barriers to integrating sustainability into local economic development initiatives.

Defining Sustainability

What is required? Create a local understanding of sustainability that accommodates multiple viewpoints.

How to do it:

- Consultation
- Community call for action
- Scenario modeling (example: use game)
- Social media
- Computer survey
- Re-enactment similar to what is done for emergency preparedness
- Use existing networks
- Leverage threats to sustainability and past crises

Who should be involved?

- Invite everyone to participate in defining sustainability
- Ensure that the mayor and local movers and shakers are on board with the process, participate and support the outcome

Prerequisites to be addressed:

- The prerequisites would be specific to the method selected - for example:
 - Plan the re-enactment
 - Develop the scenario game
 - Use strong words and images to communicate your intentions (example: the word "thrive")
- Select/build the team that will facilitate the creation of a local definition
- Balance the voices, get true contributions from stakeholders. This may mean one-on-one interviews with some stakeholders and group meetings with others.

Policy Creation, Mandate & Alignment with Official Plan

Official Plan in this context also refers to Community Plan or Municipal Development Plan depending upon jurisdictions and terminology.

What is required?

For policy creation, it would be initiated by the EDO or the sustainability coordinator and would be approved by the CAO who in turn would seek approval from Council. For alignment, the initial decision to seek alignment would be approved by Council and then staff would implement plan alignment with approvals as needed from the CAO, and revised plans would be presented to Council for approval.

1. Integrate sustainability into the Official Plan (OCP/MDP)
2. Align the following plans with sustainability:
 - Community Energy Plan
 - Community Economic Development Plan
 - Economic Development Plan
 - All Master Plans
3. Create municipal policies or bylaws to fill gaps

How to do it:

- Delivery of workshops
- Council training sessions
- Creation of a working group to define the task and manage the work
- Complete as a special task
- Communications and marketing
- Social media
- Model best practices
- Create a conference presentation which can be used at conferences for EDOs, sustainability coordinators, planners and CAOs
- Strategic secondment (put an EDO in the finance department)

Who should be involved?

- Planners
- Led by Council
- CAO/City Manager
- Managing group of the Sustainability Plan
- Department Leadership
- The public
- Economic Development Officers

Prerequisites to be met:

1. Community participation in a sustainable planning process where ownership and buy-in by community members is the result.
2. Having a community vision.
3. Access to existing plans – the ability or the right to modify the Official Plan and other important plans in order to align them with sustainability.
4. Money (how are we going to fund this). Note that many communities have added economic development to their Official Plan.
5. Flexibility.
6. The reason to do it – a necessity.

Education of Economic Development Officers and Sustainability Coordinators

What is required: Develop an education package to advance a common understanding of local economic sustainability in Canada. Disseminate widely across municipal and economic development organizations in Canada.

How to do it:

- Use educational materials/presentations at national, provincial, regional conferences and seminars
- Develop as a topic in EDAC Economic Development Year 1 and Year 2 programs
- Conduct webinars
- Use educational materials/presentations at conferences of elected representatives
- Create or add categories to EDAC and Provincial competitions/awards
- Prepare detailed case studies using different size communities, both rural and urban. Outline the critical success factors and what did not go well or failings in case studies.
- Provide mentoring for future economic development leadership
- Develop/utilize partnerships – i.e. FCM/EDAC - for seminars/joint delivery of communication and presentations
- Deliver consistent messaging
- Designate local economic sustainability ambassadors to carry message within organizations
- Make sustainability a political idea
- Grow the confidence and comfort level/knowledge of sustainability of all concerned

Prerequisites to be met:

- A common definition/understanding of local economic sustainability, a common frame of understanding including the fundamentals; and the “value proposition” of local economic sustainability.

Education of Council and the Community

What is required: Develop an education package to advance a common understanding of local economic sustainability in Canada. Disseminate widely across municipal organizations in Canada.

How to do it:

- Develop a local economic sustainability roadmap (customized to each province)
- Agree upon guiding principles/objectives to be achieved in each community
- Understand what the current knowledge base is in each community. Understand the political “hot buttons” – address these hot buttons in the roadmap
- Use educational materials/presentations at seminars/conferences, use webinars, videos, best practices
- Make local economic sustainability each elected representative’s “idea”

- Use the economic pillar as the “lead” pillar to gain acceptance of the sustainability concept
- Use concrete examples
- Use reporting tools – that build on past success
- Use executive summary case studies from different size communities, both rural and urban, addressing hot button issues and commonalities of sustainability (i.e. life cycle costs), cost efficiencies.
- Have clear goals, clear communication
- Break down departmental silos

Prerequisites to be met:

- A common definition/understanding of local economic sustainability, a common frame of understanding including the fundamentals; and the “value proposition” of local economic sustainability

Finding Local Champions

What is required: Identify local champions and empower them to encourage the integration and implementation of sustainable economic development. Champions are required:

- Within the administration
- Within the community
- On Council

How to do it:

- Incubators
- Annual awards event to recognize community involvement
- Keep local business leaders involved in implementation of sustainability
- Look at committees of Council – pull champions from committees
- Local small business advisory centres
- Balance of champions with experience and excitement (possibly define expertise of champions (some knowledge, some excitement)
- Process depends on the community - do what works in your community
- Process must be inclusive
- Empower the champions
- Appoint champions (respected community members)
- Learning about other experiences
 - Online or physical directory of lessons learned/case studies/best practices
- FCM could recognize champions
- Online community of practice

Building/Sharing the Business Case for Sustainable Economic Development

What is required: Provide tools to facilitate the development of the business case for sustainable economic development by practitioners.

How to do it:

- Look at examples that are already out there (best practices)
- Share the resources available from Bob Willard including his new book *The New Sustainability Advantage*, and the many resources available now for free that outline how going sustainable can improve business profit by at least 51% to 81% within three to five years (<http://www.sustainabilityadvantage.com>)
- Develop an online inventory including:
 - Project examples
 - Payback on investments
 - Costs/benefits
 - Job creation
 - Metrics
- Demonstrate Value for Money/ROI – demonstrate value of the investments
- Use external evaluations of projects - audit to see if what was planned actually happened
- Develop and use a generic template/spreadsheet for project financial analysis/business planning
- Profile the projects that have been the most successful (or have the potential to be the most successful)
- Offering/coordinating tours to best practice organizations/projects

Who should be involved?

- Chambers of Commerce
- EDOs/municipalities
- Consultants