

A background network diagram consisting of numerous blue circular nodes of varying sizes connected by thin, light blue lines, creating a complex web-like structure.

# About USDN, a Project of GPP

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*USDN is a project of Global Philanthropy Partnership (GPP).*

**Connecting People. Fostering Innovation.**

**USDN** | urban sustainability  
directors network



# I. USDN PURPOSE

## USDN MISSION

Connecting local government practitioners to accelerate urban sustainability in U.S. and Canadian communities

## USDN VISION

USDN governments are leading the way to a sustainable, low-carbon future by developing, adopting, and sharing practices that create equitable and prosperous communities and a healthy environment.

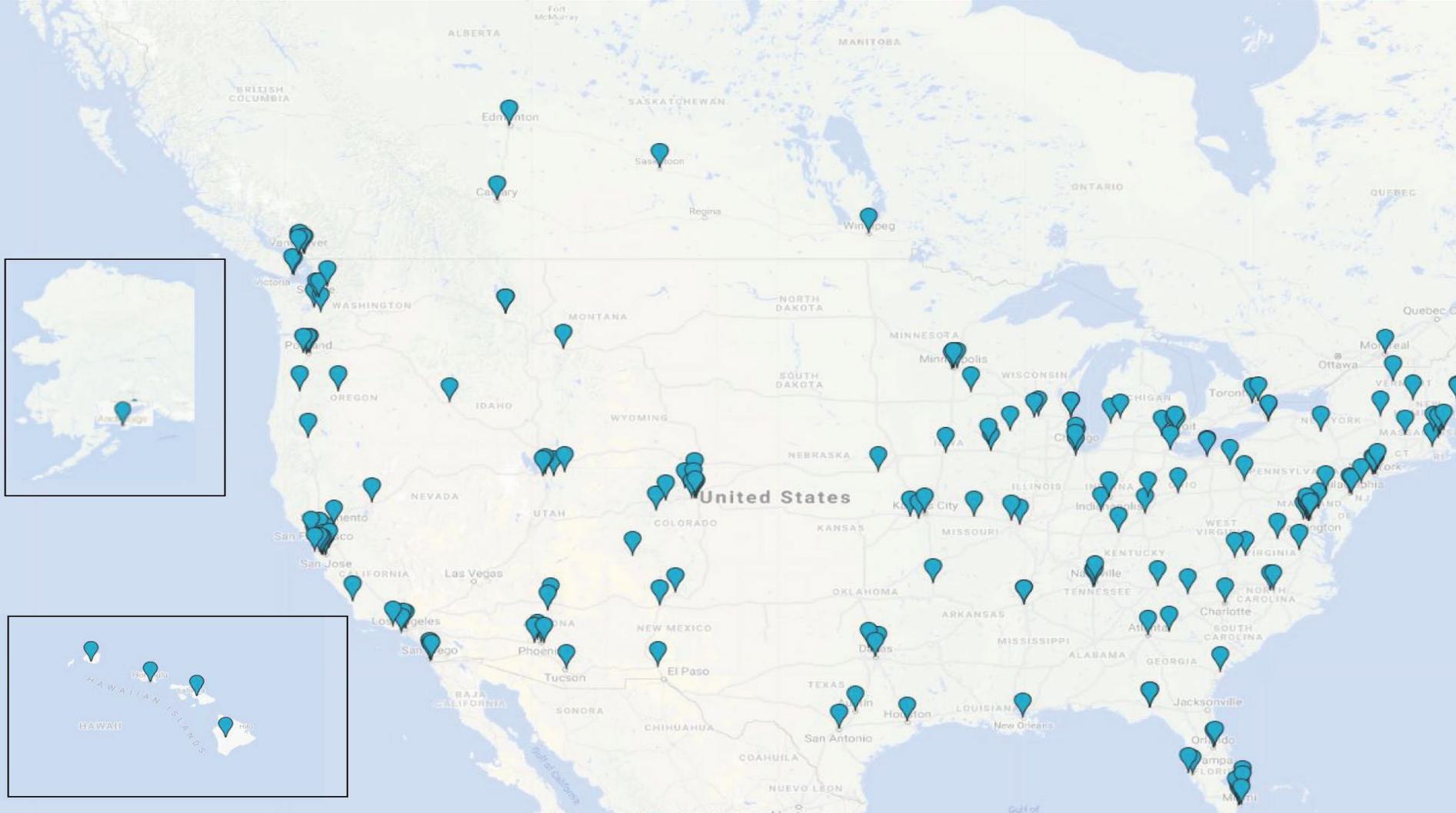
## USDN THEORY OF CHANGE

Peer exchange and collaboration between local government sustainability leaders catalyze the creation and implementation of urban sustainability solutions. The network creates change in the world by connecting members to share and learn from each other, incentivizing collaboration, and collectively leveraging resources.

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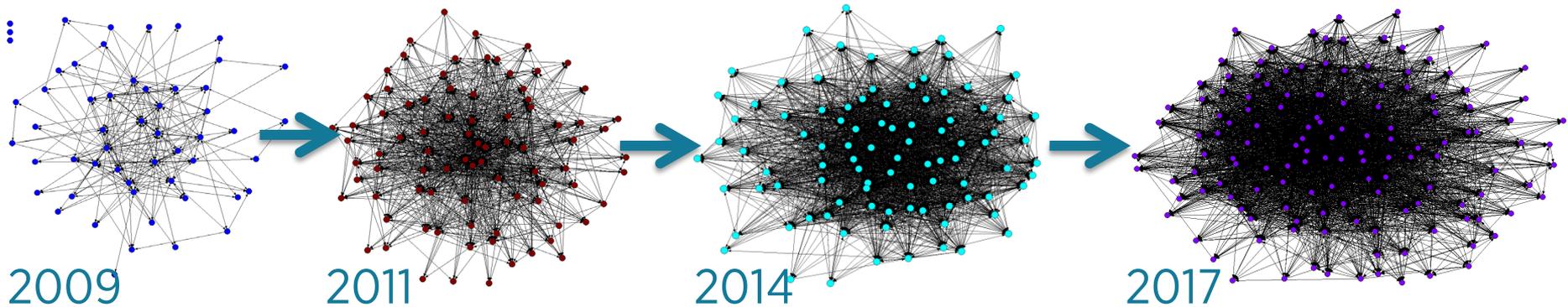
# II. MEMBERS

198 USDN communities represent 87 million U.S. and Canadian residents



# MEMBER CONNECTIONS

USDN generated a network map that shows the ties among members, including information exchange and collaborative relationships.



In our first set of maps in 2009, on average, a member knew 8 other members.  
Now members know nearly 40 of their peers!

# EVOLUTION OF MEMBER-LED ACTIVITIES

## 2009-2010

- Annual Meeting
- 5 User Groups
- Innovation Fund

## 2011-2012

- Annual Meeting
- 10 User Groups
- Website
- Innovation Fund
- 6 Regional Networks

## 2013-2014

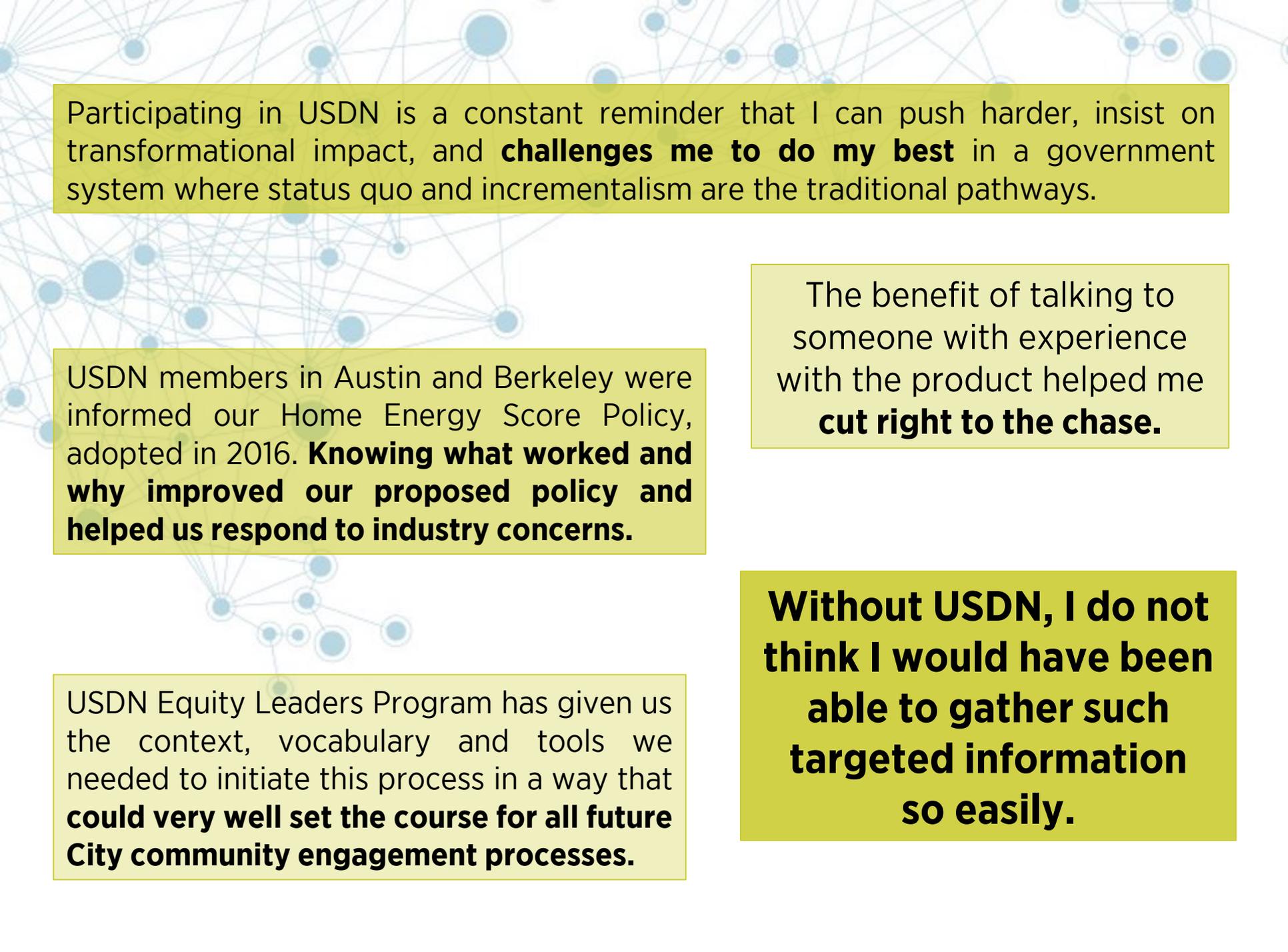
- Annual Meeting
- 15 User Groups
- Website
- Innovation Fund
- 8 Regional Networks
- Peer Learning Exchange Grants
- Focus Area: Climate Adaptation
- Strategic Partnerships
- Social Equity
- U.S. Federal Policy

## 2015-2016

- Annual Meeting
- 20+ User Groups
- Website
- Innovation Fund Grants
- 9 Regional Networks
- Peer Learning Exchange Grants
- Focus Areas: Climate Adaptation and Carbon Reduction
- Social Equity
- Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance
- External Relations
- Strategic Partnerships
- U.S. Federal Policy
- Succession Planning
- Long-Term Strategic Planning

## 2017-2019

- Annual Meeting
- 10+ Peer Learning Groups
- 10+ Action-Focused Groups
- Identified High Impact Priorities
- Network Strategy Committees
- Innovation Fund Grants
- Commissioned Projects
- Collective Impact Projects
- In-Person Trainings
- 9 Partner Networks
- Peer Learning Exchange Grants
- Website with Curated Content
- Focus Areas: Climate Adaptation, Carbon Reduction, Racial Equity
- Equity Leaders Program
- Carbon Neutral Cities Alliance
- Strategic Partnerships
- U.S. Federal Policy
- Common Metrics Planning
- New CRM and Eval Efforts
- Membership and Financial Strategy
- 501(c)3 Transition
- Strategic Planning with Partners for Places

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Participating in USDN is a constant reminder that I can push harder, insist on transformational impact, and **challenges me to do my best** in a government system where status quo and incrementalism are the traditional pathways.

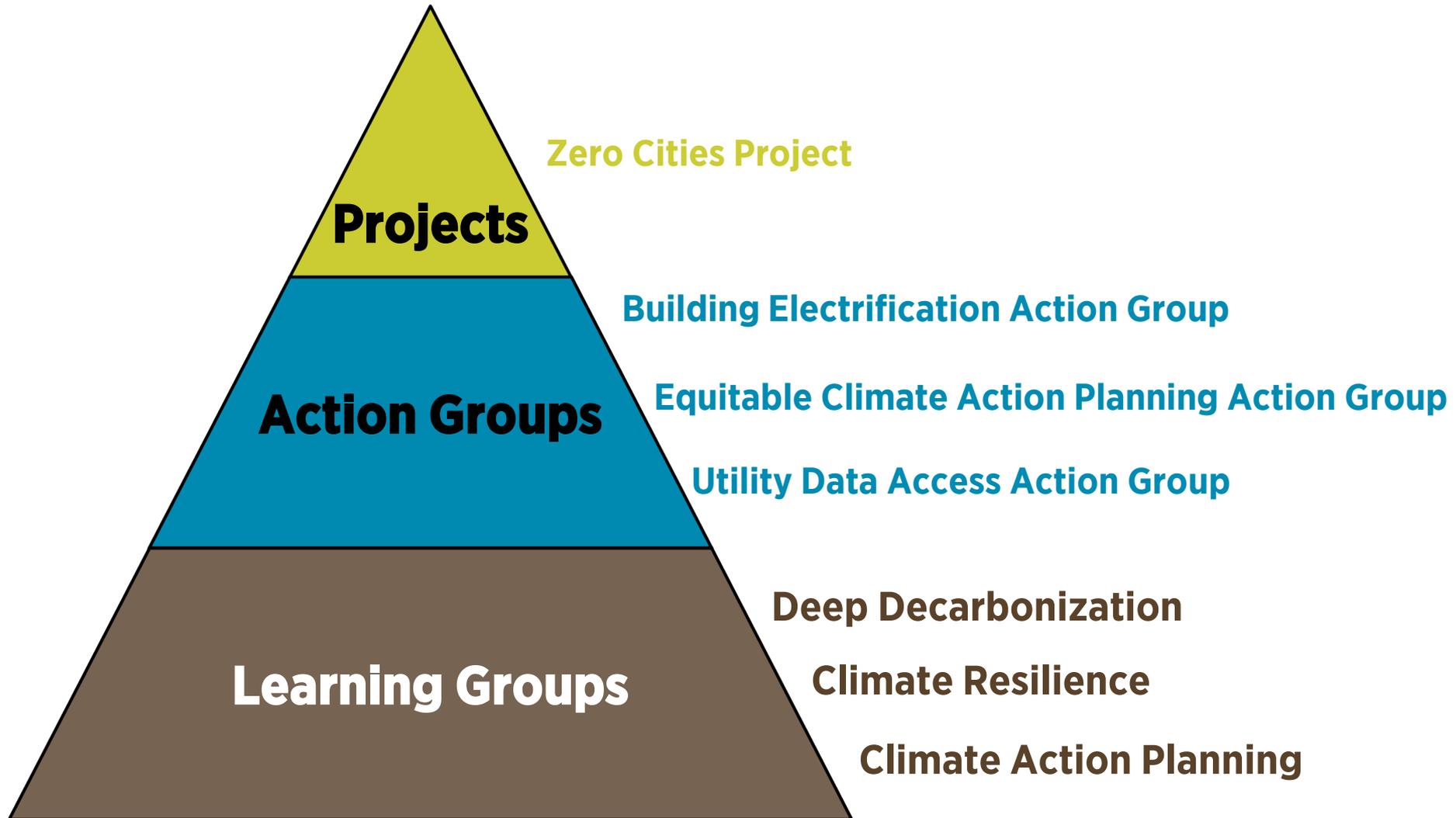
USDN members in Austin and Berkeley were informed our Home Energy Score Policy, adopted in 2016. **Knowing what worked and why improved our proposed policy and helped us respond to industry concerns.**

USDN Equity Leaders Program has given us the context, vocabulary and tools we needed to initiate this process in a way that **could very well set the course for all future City community engagement processes.**

The benefit of talking to someone with experience with the product helped me **cut right to the chase.**

**Without USDN, I do not think I would have been able to gather such targeted information so easily.**

# WAYS WE ACHIEVE IMPACT



# GOAL 1 - PEER LEARNING

Building Connectivity Among Member Sustainability Directors

## USDN fosters peer exchange and learning through:

- Annual Meeting
- USDN.org Website
- Monthly All-Network Calls
- Learning and Action Groups
- Peer Learning Exchanges
- Weekly E-News

# USDN PEER LEARNING EXCHANGE

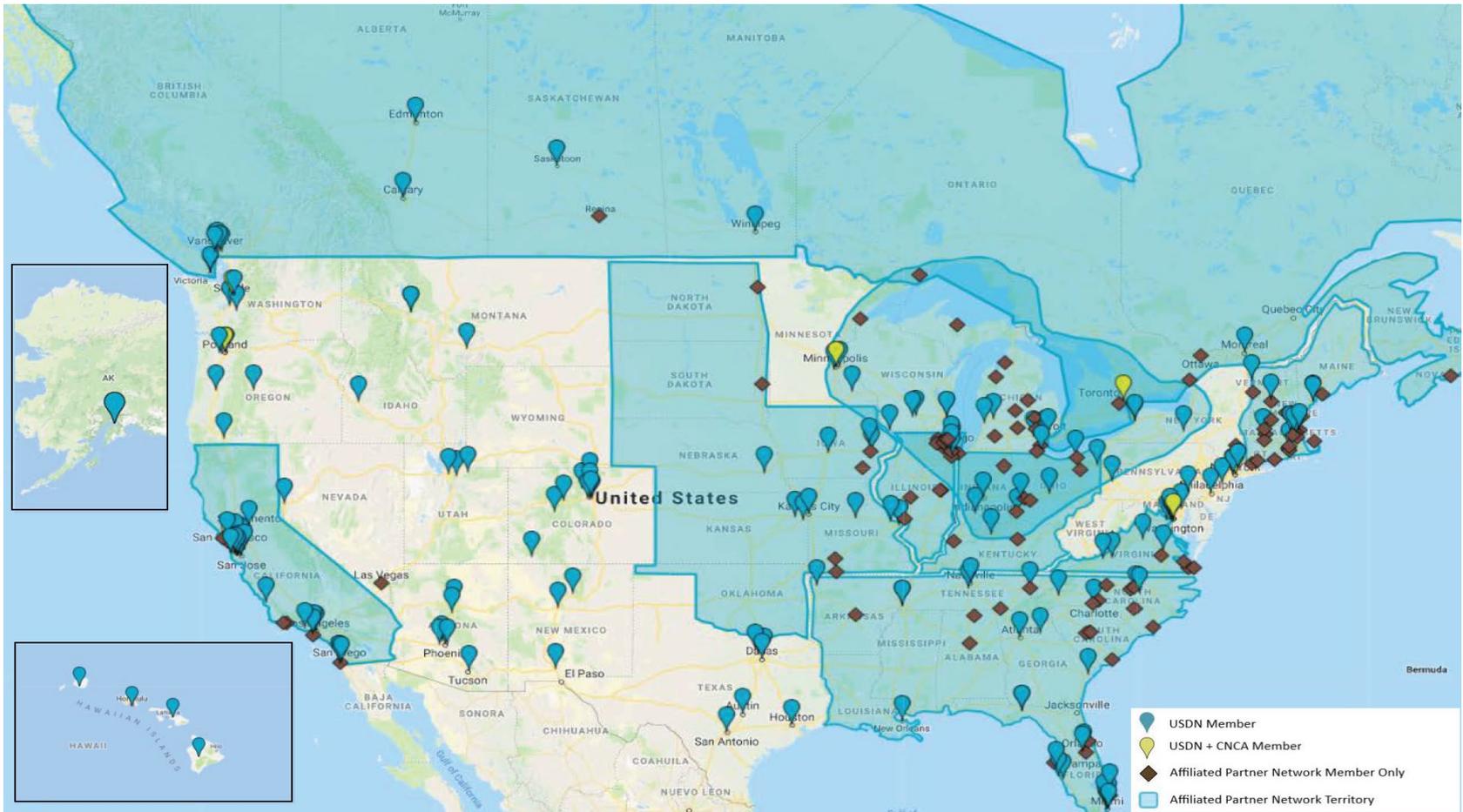
The USDN Peer Learning Exchange program supports USDN members to meet in person with their peers to learn and share together about one or more practices, policies, or programs.

These pro-active, facilitated, deeper peer learning methods, include:

- **Best Practice Dissemination:** Collaborative work to deeply share a member's policy/practice with one or more peers who are ready to adapt it,
- **Peer Review:** Critical assessments of and/or recommendations for a member's selected policy/program by one or more peers, and
- **In-Depth Exchanges:** Detailed discussions between two or more members to deeply explore several shared priority topics, creating value for all participants.

# FOSTERING PARTNER NETWORKS

USDN helps build and aligns with structured multistate networks of sustainability directors as a way to grow networking opportunities and collaborative action.



# PARTNERS FOR PLACES

USDN partners with the Funders' Network for Smart Growth and Livable Communities and national foundations on the Partners for Places grant program, which:

- Catalyze partnerships between municipal or county-level sustainability directors and local, place-based foundations to advance important community-based sustainability initiatives
- Provide matching funds for partnership projects of \$25,000 to \$75,000
- A pathway for dissemination of sustainability innovations because it prioritizes USDN member innovation priorities

The grant program:

- Launched in January 2012
- Provides at least 50% of grants go to USDN Members
- Has grown to \$1 million plus \$1 million in matching grants from local foundations

# GOAL 2 – COLLABORATION



**USDN creates impact through the innovation and adoption of key sustainability practices through:**

- Action Groups
- Projects and Partnerships
- Grant programs

As a result of our convening, **municipal sustainability staff have been identified as unique and important stakeholders (and allies!)** for utilities as they advance sustainable energy priorities.

**Without the funding and multi-city collaboration, it would have been impossible for us to launch this program.**

Game of Floods was a **useful tool for training staff** on climate preparedness that would have required time and expense to prepare in-house.

Participating in USDN allowed us to quickly develop a pitch for key climate projects based on peer city models to **find \$1,000,000 in funding.**

Examples of plans and RFPs from other USDN members were extremely valuable and **saved many hours of work.**

Quickly and easily finding what other cities are doing and that solutions exist is **the most important step** in raising sustainability issues up for discussion and demonstrating that we can do something about it.

# USDN INNOVATION FUND

**Mission:** To assist USDN members and their partners in collaborating to identify, develop, and scale high-impact solutions that advance urban sustainability.

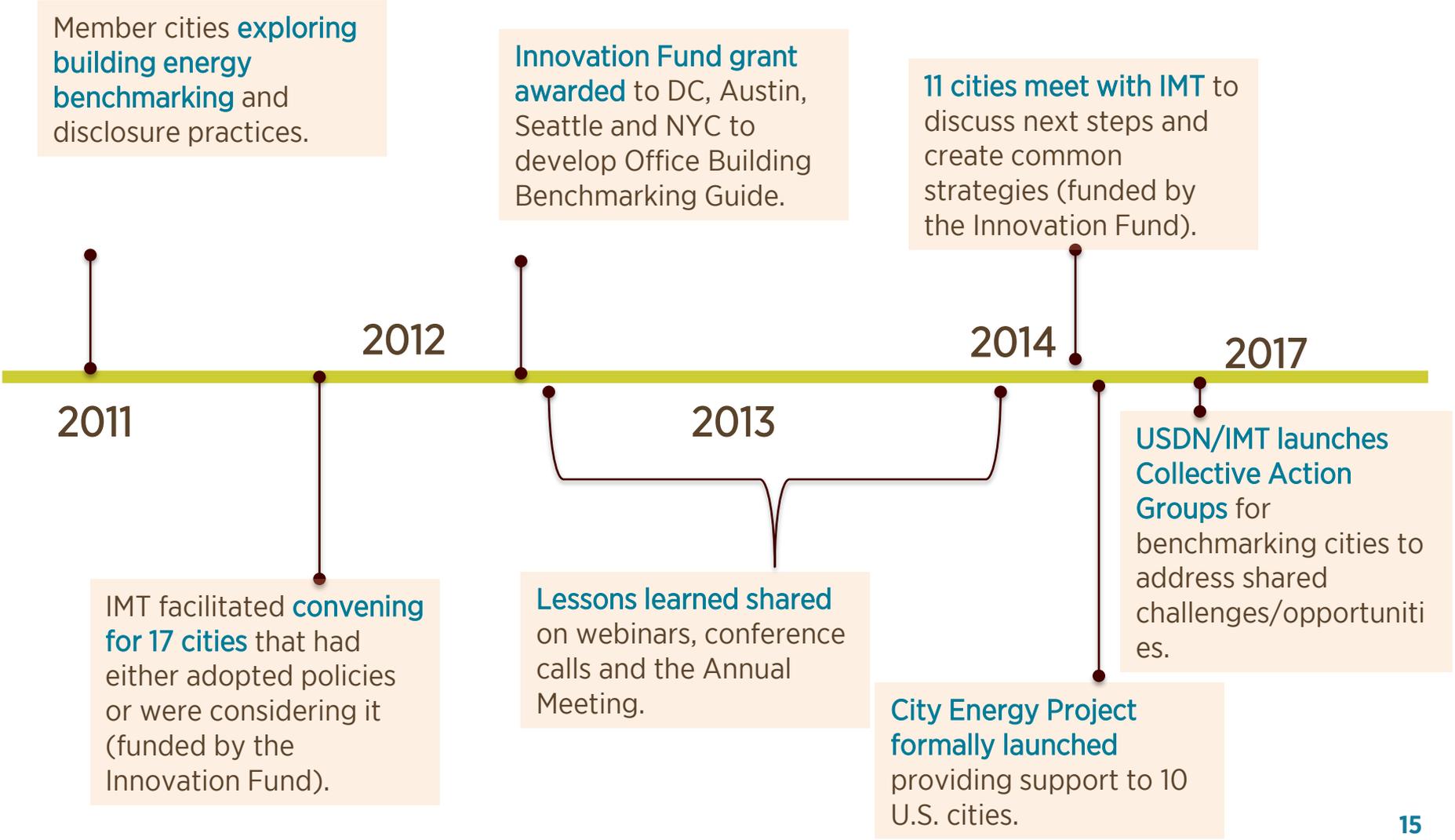
## The USDN Innovation Fund:

- Is governed by the USDN Innovation Fund Steering Committee of members, who:
  - approve and issue RFPs—or identify potential projects to commission to fill an innovation gap.
  - review, score, and select proposals that will be funded, and then monitor their progress for impact.
- Is staffed by Sutherland and Associates.
- Has invested \$3.6 million in urban sustainability innovation since 2009.

## Goals for 2018

1. Improve Idea Sourcing from Members Around New Innovations
2. Promote Product Leverage and Use to Refine Innovations
3. Advance Innovations through the First Portion of the Pathway
4. Broaden Collaborative Participation Around New Innovation Development

# USDN INNOVATION FUND CASE STUDY: BUILDING ENERGY BENCHMARKING POLICIES



# CNCA INNOVATION FUND

**Mission:** To invest in high-potential, city-led projects that develop, test, implement, and amplify deep urban decarbonization strategies and practices.

## The CNCA Innovation Fund:

- Is governed by the CNCA Innovation Fund Steering Committee of members, who:
  - approve and issue RFPs—or identify potential projects to commission to fill an innovation gap.
  - review, score, and select proposals that will be funded, and then monitor their progress for impact.
- Is staffed by Sutherland and Associates.
- Has invested \$2.4 million in deep decarbonization since 2015.

## Projects can scale beyond the CNCA membership:

1. Any city in the world can receive funding, if a CNCA member city leads the project team.
2. Scalability is part of the criteria CNCA Innovation Fund proposals are evaluated against.
3. Projects share methodologies, so other cities can locally apply relevant concepts.
4. City grant leads collaborate with other CNCA cities as well as “next wave” cities.

# PRODUCTS OF GRANT PROGRAMS

**Members have created tools and resources to spur innovation and scale sustainability.**

All products are available to members and non-members on the USDN.org website here: <http://usdn.org/public/Innovation.html>.

USDN also helps partners, sustainability professionals, and our followers stay up to date with USDN members' innovations through the monthly **Urban Sustainability Innovation Report**. This newsletter highlights our members' work on the cutting edge of urban sustainability innovation.

View past articles [here](#). Sign up to receive the report [here](#).

# NETWORK GOVERNANCE

Most USDN Activity Is Directed by Members

## **The USDN Long-Term Strategic Plan was crafted by and for members, adopted at the 2016 Annual Meeting.**

- The USDN Planning Committee oversees program implementation and commits to actively engaging with other USDN members about satisfaction with the network.
- At least 10 members serve on the Planning Committee.
- **Committee** membership changes each year when two members cycle off and two members cycle on, based on:
  - Interest in Planning Committee
  - Past participation in USDN activities
  - Vision for the future of the network
  - Contribution to Committee diversity (size of city, region, etc.)

# USDN FUNDERS



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## USDN Membership Dues & Voluntary Contributions

# Thank You!

For more information, please contact:

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