

CORPORATE FUND APPLICATION

- 1. Description of your organization** including mission statement, current goals for the organization, program activities, and number of people served.

The Commission has been providing professional planning assistance to municipal boards since 1963 when it was the Upper Valley Development Council. Our current staff's areas of expertise include comprehensive planning, land use regulations, transportation planning, natural resource inventories, community/economic development, public participation, affordable housing, and hazard mitigation planning.

The Commission serves 27 municipalities, local groups such as river advisory committees, economic development councils, housing organizations and others who are in the business of developing the future land use of the region.

The Commission is governed by representatives, referred to as Commissioners, from member communities and counties as well as a small number of at-large-members. It is the Commissioners' role to be a regional collaborator and bring local issues to the attention of the Commission and conversely to articulate regional strategies that can benefit local efforts.

The Commission is currently engaged in a strategic planning process in order to determine an appropriate mission, goals and objectives that will lead the organization to a more dynamic future.

- 2. Description of conditions or issues that the project is intended to address.** We encourage you to include an honest assessment of the challenges your organization faces and efforts to date to address them.

The Commission has been engaged in the planning industry for many years. It has been successful in delivering regional products in transportation and land use planning. It has also been very successful in assisting communities on a local level in developing zoning ordinances and master plans. What the Commission has failed to do is convincingly communicate to its members the value of its work and the connection between land use planning and an enriching and vibrant community. The organization is not seen as a regional leader, which will be necessary for growth and financial stability in the future.

Commissioners and staff alike, find it difficult to quickly articulate what the Commission's purpose and expectations are now and for the future. Entering into contracts for services and work is done based on meeting budgetary needs as opposed to fulfilling the purpose of the organization. This is often done out of perceived necessity to maintain the organization, but can result in requiring scattered and new technical skill sets that can stress personnel.

The Commission currently has no written mission statement, nor does it have a set of internal goals and objectives. The organization has maintained, as it is mandated, a Regional Plan that outlines some of the region's goals and objectives. However, the document has not kept pace with the changing politics and needs of the region. Additionally the Regional Plan is intended to provide communities a roadmap for future development. It is not intended to be the organization's guide.

Within the past year, the Commission has undergone significant changes in its leadership. A new Executive Director was hired in June, 2007. Of the potential 66 + Commissioners that could govern the organization there are currently 36 appointed Commissioners with many vacancies. Additionally, since June 2007, there have been 11

new Commissioners appointed by communities and six Commissioners have resigned for various reasons. These changes have brought new energy to the Commission, while some organizational knowledge has been lost. It has brought up questions about how the organization is run, and what its role is within the region. It is in the process of building capacity and asking, "In what direction and pace should it grow in the future." Although the organization has been in existence for nearly 45 years, it has maintained about the same number of staff for most of those years.

The strategic planning process that the Commission is undertaking is happening at a crucial time when there is not only a need within the region to enlist leadership, but also a need internally within the organization to understand its role, limitations and priorities. Ultimately as a corollary, we are hoping to engage members to embrace the value of regionalism and recognize the benefit to balancing local interests with a more holistic understanding of land use implications regionally.

3. Description of the project. This section should include:

- A statement of Project Objectives. How will the project address the problem or conditions facing the organization?

All regional planning commissions within the State of NH are enabled to provide regional planning services to member communities. The level of expertise and diversity of interests necessary to address growth management and land use decisions is enormous. They are, and have historically been, significantly underfunded to complete the expectations established through legislation.

A significant amount (approximately 45%) of the Commission's funding is through a contractual relationship with the NH Department of Transportation. As federal and state funding sources become more competitive and precarious, the Commission must address ways to diversify its funding sources. It is speculated that a significant amount of local contracts in addition to a broad-based understanding and support for planning in general will be the future sustainability of the organization.

In order to move in this direction it will be necessary for the Commission to be able to articulate a clear mission and vision of the organization and guide future decision-making on a set of goals and objectives that are shared not only among the staff and Commissioners, but are endorsed by the communities within the region.

- Project Plan: What steps or activities will you engage in to achieve these objectives?

The Strategic Planning Committee is anticipating taking the information gained through an initial kick-off meeting held in February, in conjunction with past materials gathered, to hold five regional meetings to engage public officials and local organizations and residents. A survey will be sent to the leadership of each municipality and to local non-profits that work with the Commission. The survey will be used as a base to begin discussion at the regional meetings. The governing structure of the organization lies with the communities. Gathering information to understand the external issues that the Commission should be addressing will be essential to determining the future role of the organization.

The information gathered at the regional meetings will be used to bring the Commissioners back to a second meeting to outline how the input received could shape future decisions within the Commission. After providing an overview for the Commissioners regarding the internal functions of the organization, the Commissioners will begin to outline some goals for the organization.

At some point during the process, key stakeholders will be asked to provide their input to the process.

Once some clearly defined goals are accepted by the Commission, the Strategic Planning Committee will begin to outline how those goals could be met. This may mean looking at the specifics of the organizations funding sources, expenses, marketing and outreach efforts, potential revenue generation, professional development and long-term strategies.

A set of potential strategies will be presented to the full Commission for their input

- Project Leaders: What staff and board will be involved in the project?

The Commission has formed a Strategic Planning Committee that consists of four Commissioners and is staffed by the Executive Director. While the Strategic Planning Committee has taken the lead in developing a plan, the entire Commission and staff have been and will continue to be involved in the process through a number of convening meetings.

Three selected Commissioners, and three staff will engage in the Core Capacity Assessment Tool developed by the NH Center for Nonprofits in partnership with TCC Group. The tool provides an analysis of an organization's current status in the Four Core Capacities that are believed crucial for organizational effectiveness. It provides users with a report analyzing their strengths and providing recommendations for future growth and change within each capacity area (leadership, adaptive, management and technical), including sub-categories that provide deeper insight into each core capacity.

The entire Commission will participate at some level in the process or at its review.

- Description of Consultant: If you are hiring a consultant, please include a brief description of the services that person will provide and consultant's qualifications.

The Commission has engaged the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension to assist with facilitation of meetings, both with the Commissioners and the public. Specifically, Deb Maes from the Grafton County Cooperative Extension has been assisting the Commission through the process. The relationship has been a very good fit with the diversity and strong qualities of the Commissioners.

- 4. Organizational Readiness and Sustaining Changes.** What steps has your organization taken to prepare for this work? How will you ensure that these changes will be sustained over time – in terms of staffing future funding, etc.?

To the recollection of current and past Commissioners and Executive Directors, a strategic planning process for the organization has not been completed to date. The organization does not have a mission statement, nor is there a clear set of goals that are shared among the leadership.

The Commission has engaged a group of Commissioners to realign the Bylaws of the organization through an ad-hoc Bylaw Committee. This Committee has met an average of once every 3-4 weeks over the last year and half. The Committee has spent considerable effort creating Bylaws that not only reflect a clear understanding of the complexity of the organization, but also are flexible while providing guidance to the leadership of the

organization. The Committee is expected to complete their work within the next few months, setting the stage for the Strategic Planning Committee.

The Commission has had a change in leadership in the past year. A new Executive Director has been hired whose strengths are bringing funding to the region and effective motivation of the staff as well as public relations in the region. Staff and selected Commissioners will complete the Core Capacity Assessment Tool to assist with determining some of the strategies that would be helpful to the organization. It is planned to use the tool again after two years to assess how well the Commission has stayed on task in developing the capacity of the organization.

The Commission has become very engaged in developing the framework necessary to build a strong organization through its focus on committee work that addresses administrative issues from developing new bylaws to establishing a retirement contribution for employees. The Commission has active committees who, since June, have completed among other things, creation of a Strategic Planning Committee, instituted a credit card policy, changed expenditure policy, begun a harassment policy, transferred reserve funding to insured accounts, and addressed vacation and comp-time liability issue.

The Executive Director attended the training on the Core Capacity Assessment Tool. This tool will be useful in determining strategies that will assist in focusing the Strategic Planning Committee to develop goals and objectives that are specific and meaningful for this organization's issues. This has been part of an overall strategy to align the organization in a manner that is responsive to transition and can be sustained through organizational capacity regardless of the current leadership. Commissioners have the ability to change on a consistent basis very much like any other appointed volunteer position.

The Strategic Planning Committee has been meeting since late fall of '07. To date they have organized, elected a chair, convened a kick-off meeting to begin the process and have the Commissioners outline important themes for the organization, developed a survey and outlined the process to move forward. The purpose of the survey is to create a foundation that will set the stage for the regional meetings.

5. **Criteria for measuring success.** Tell us briefly what criteria you will use to measure the success or progress of this project.

The project will be successful when a strategic plan has been completed and published.

The project will be successful if the Commissioners have participated in the process

The project will be successful if communities have participated in the process and gained a better understanding of the work that the Commission does.

The project will be successful when the organization has moved closer to filling a leadership role within the region.

The project will be successful when the staff and Commissioners have gained a better understanding of the mission of the organization.

The project will be successful when the capacity of the organization has been increased, measured by local contracts.

The project will be successful when there is a greater understanding of regionalism.