

## BACKGROUND

In early 2021, the Board of Directors of the Development Districts Association of Appalachia met via a series of virtual meetings to draft a strategic plan driving DDAA's activities and programming for 2021-2025. Our current draft plan is presented below.

DDAA represents 73 Local Development Districts (LDDs) serving the 420 counties of the Appalachian Region. DDAA is currently managed by the Center for Regional Economic Competitiveness (CREC) which provides staff support to the organization and its members.

The DDAA strategic planning process proceeded through a series of facilitated discussions that assessed the organization's recent evolution, areas of competitive strength, and areas of potential program gaps. A review of these discussions is presented in Appendix 1, which summarizes the Board's SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis.

Armed with this analysis, Board members defined DDAA's Vision Statement, Guiding Principles, and Mission Statement, and identified priority action areas to drive DDAA's work over the next several years. These suggested focus areas are presented below in a format that identifies the focus area, specific action items related to the focus area, and potential performance measures to assess progress and impacts. Within these focus areas, several action items were identified as priority areas for new or expanded DDAA activities or focus.

1. Develop advocacy priorities through a newly created advocacy committee.
2. Redesign current peer review and exchange processes via DDAA's existing professional development committee.
3. Develop new programming that engages LDD staff members and promotes leadership development via new trainings, awards, and expanded peer connection.

These items were designated as higher priority for Board consideration and action in the coming year. They are noted in bold in the action discussions presented below. These priority action items will supplement the core activities already underway and highlighted in the current DDAA management contract with CREC.

## DRAFT VISION STATEMENT

**DDAA will be the leading resource for local development districts in the Appalachian region.**

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

**DDAA operates with a commitment to collaboration, innovation, and integrity.**

## MISSION STATEMENT

**DDAA supports Local Development Districts in building healthy, prosperous, diverse, and resilient communities across the Appalachian Region.**

DDAA accomplishes its mission through:

- **LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Providing high-quality training and resources to our members and their communities
- **ADVOCACY:** Serving as a voice for the Appalachian region and for the work of our local development district network
- **NETWORKING:** Connecting our members across the Appalachian region and beyond
- **ENGAGEMENT:** Partnering with federal, state, and local efforts to advance the Appalachian region
- **INNOVATION:** Developing and sharing new program and policy innovations across Appalachia

## DDAA PRIORITY FOCUS AREAS

- 1) **LEADERSHIP AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:** Strengthen DDAA's organizational capacities to expand and enhance education and training opportunities for DDAA members.

Training and professional development have long been a core activity for DDAA. DDAA will update and expand training offerings to better engage members and their partners and stakeholders.

### Action Items: Leadership and Professional Development

- 1.1 Offer new educational opportunities for LDD leaders on the business side of running an LDD.
  - Examples might include:
    - Offer specialized training or peer-to-peer town hall sessions on specialty topics (e.g., employment law, effective advocacy and story-telling).
    - Create a document portal that contains sample business documents, such as RFPs and by-laws.
- 1.2 Develop specialized training content targeted to a broader audience of Appalachian leaders, including LDD board members and partner organizations.
- 1.3 Develop LDD staff and leadership orientation (new training program for new directors and staff).
- 1.4 Continue to deliver two conferences per year: an annual meeting (typically held in March) and an annual training conference (typically held in the summer).
- 1.5 Continue to develop and deliver additional training programs and webinars in coordination with the DDAA professional development committee.

### Potential Metrics: Leadership and Professional Development

- Number of targeted training programs delivered
- Number of program participants
- Attendee satisfaction with programs

## 2) **ADVOCACY: Champion DDAA and its members more actively and effectively.**

DDAA will assume a more prominent role in advocating for LDDs and for Appalachia in federal, state, and regional public policy debates. DDAA can take a leadership role in telling the story of the good work underway in Appalachia by LDDs and by community partners.

### Action Items: Advocacy

- 2.1 Identify (up to three) high priority issues annually (through newly created DDAA Advocacy Committee) that would serve as the centerpiece for DDAA's advocacy work.
- 2.2 Implement outreach strategies to support DDAA's advocacy work, including developing marketing materials and reports that highlight the return on investment from LDDs.
- 2.3 Support collaborations and activities designed to engage key partners such as Congressional or Federal agency staff that invest in Appalachian communities.

### Potential Metrics: Advocacy

- Demonstrated effects on policy
- Participation in advocacy efforts (events, meetings, webinars, etc.) focused on telling the Appalachian and LDD story
- Engagement with key partners (number of interactions or participants in events)

### 3) NETWORKING: Connect DDAA members across the Appalachian region and beyond.

DDAA is as strong as its network. Connecting with peers is the primary benefit DDAA members highlight, welcoming the organization's close connections and "family atmosphere." DDAA will expand avenues for members to collaborate and share best practices.

#### Action Items: Networking

- 3.1 Redesign current peer review and exchange processes via DDAA's existing professional development committee.
- 3.2 Develop 1-2 peer-to-peer learning networks (i.e., communities of practice) each year focused on key topics of interest to DDAA member staff (e.g., RLF practitioners, recovery-to-work, broadband administration, GIS, etc.).
- 3.3 Continue to deliver the monthly DDAA e-newsletter to all DDAA members.
- 3.4 Expand opportunities for emerging leaders to engage with the DDAA network through in-house efforts and greater DDAA emphasis encouraging LDD participation in ARC's Appalachian Leadership Development Institute.
- 3.5 Assess how best to re-engage non-member LDDs and less-engaged member LDDs to identify and respond to their needs.
- 3.6 Conduct annual member survey to identify priority items to inform DDAA's annual work program.

#### Potential Metrics: Networking

- Increase in Membership
- Increased participation in DDAA activities, especially in peer exchanges and learning networks
- Increased open and click rate in newsletter

#### 4) ENGAGEMENT: Partner with federal, state, and regional efforts to advance the Appalachian region.

DDAA is a cohesive network that works closely with ARC and NADO, but our work could benefit from stronger engagement with external public, private, and non-profit partners. This engagement could expand DDAA's impact, tell a more compelling story about our work across Appalachia, and increase support for the LDDs and DDAA.

##### Action Items: Engagement

- 4.1 Develop formalized partnerships with other regional commissions, such as the Delta Regional Authority.
- 4.2 Expand outreach efforts to EDA, USDA, and other potential Federal partners.
- 4.3 Develop and engage in broader networks to support priority advocacy issues, such as broadband or substance use recovery work.
- 4.4 Designate DDAA staff and/or members to actively participate with peer network groups (e.g., ARC State Representatives, NADO, SERDI, and others) to represent the Appalachian LDD voice.

##### Potential Metrics: Engagement

- Increase in collaborative projects
- Increase in formal partnership agreements
- Participation in network discussions

5) **INNOVATION:** Develop and share new ideas and programs to advance and guide development in Appalachia.

DDAA provides an excellent venue for LDDs to learn about new program and policy innovations. At present, this work is informal and unstructured. DDAA should develop more formalized systems to identify and share leading practices and innovations.

Action Items: Innovation

- 5.1 Share innovative programs, best practice cases, and on-line tools from the DDAA network on the DDAA website, in relevant reports, and through member recognition.
- 5.2 Develop an awards program that highlights LDD innovations.
- 5.3 Identify and document emerging challenges/issues and solutions (esp. related to COVID-19 recovery) through research, policy analysis, and technical assistance.

Potential Metrics: Innovation

- Awards for DDAA members
- Reports/guidance on emerging topics
- Number of relevant best practices and innovative efforts featured on the DDAA website

## APPENDIX 1: DDAA SWOT ANALYSIS (January 2021)

Internal

### Strengths

- **Great Networking/Peer Learning Venue**
  - Great venue for networking opportunities and peer learning
  - Learn and share about leading edge ideas
  - Bank of institutional knowledge
- **Training opportunities and events**
- **Organization Size and Culture**
  - Tradition of cooperation among LDDs—the family atmosphere
  - Size of organization is an asset—small enough to allow direct connection/interaction across LDDs
  - Goldilocks—big enough and small enough to do our work
- **Good Capacity to Undertake New and Innovative Projects**
  - DDAA is able to innovate and swiftly adopt new programs and focus areas. (e.g., substance use work)
  - Diversity of membership and of activities by member LDDs
- **Solid Organizational Base**
  - CREC is providing good support/capacity. Organization is more professionally managed.
  - Engaged Board of Directors
- **Strong Partnerships**
  - Non-governmental arm to represent us/advocacy
  - Close links/ties with ARC—they are good partner
  - Good ties to NADO and other partners

### Weaknesses

- **Peer Learning Capacities Could Be Improved**
  - Hard to do meetings in the region—lack of good venues that are easy to access—affordable
  - Peer learning opportunities are underutilized—big issue is timing and capacity (Create new opportunities/approaches at new sites)
  - Limited resources for members limit ability to travel and engage in professional development opportunities.
  - Better sharing of institutional knowledge? Time, capacity restraints
  - LDDs aren't fully aware of availability
- **Not all LDDs Fully Engaged**
  - Dues structure may limit some potential new members.
  - How to build a greater sense of connection between members and DDAA, such as experiences with SERDI
  - Lack of consistent connection between DDAA and staff
- **Outreach/Advocacy role is limited**
  - Could do more to support ARC and individual LDDs
  - Lack capacity/experience in effectively telling the “story” of Appalachia, DDAA, and our specific LDDs.
- **Need more engagement with existing members**
- **Need better support for new leaders**
  - Limited pathways to identify and groom emerging leaders in the industry.
  - More support for new LDD executive directors and future leaders
  - Encourage executive directors to engage with ARC, other resources



### Opportunities

- **DDAA mission well-aligned with current policy directions**
  - Economic recovery focus of new Administration.
  - Interdependence between urban and rural areas—focus more on this?
- **Enhanced public advocacy mission**
  - Advocacy within the region—need more direct interaction and input to elected officials. Need to share local impacts of federal investments.
  - More active advocacy role for DDAA---LDDs lack capacity to do this on their own (e.g., Issues like broadband)
  - Need stronger/revised approach to advocacy work in DC
  - Need to tell our story of DDAA by using data or analysis on the Appalachian regional economy.
  - Engage Hill staffers in conference, webinars, etc. on relevant topics
- **Enhanced learning resources for DDAA network**
  - Create a portal for LDDs/regional commissions (e.g., sample documents like RFPs, MOUs, by-laws, policies)
  - Training on how to run LDDs and role/purpose of LDDs—for newcomers especially
  - Training in mgmt./back office issues such as employment law
  - Rethink peer exchanges, e.g., use an RFP process and learning academy model to expand interest
  - More formalized training offerings—with certifications?
- **Engage New Partners**
  - Engage more with state program managers? Need to think more on how/whether to do this—like to keep LDD focus w/in DDAA
  - Build closer ties to Delta Regional Authority and other regional Commissions.
  - Target key areas, e.g., SUD, to engage with federal or other resources, e.g., DOL or SAMSHA.
- **Build relevancy of DDAA to membership – engage less-engaged parts of network**
  - Raise visibility of CREC staff with non-board executive directors, staff
  - Board members to proselytize to peers on DDAA – sharing marketing, events, materials, etc.
  - Help guide members in understanding/recognizing transition from self-managed to professionally managed organization

### Threats

- **Political Conflict/Challenges to democracy.**
  - Extremism on both sides—less willingness to compromise
  - Changes in leadership that include fewer with direct ties to Appalachia)
- **Funding/Over-reliance on ARC Support**
  - Changes in things that are fundable by ARC and others (need to be prepared for change of direction in new Administration)
  - Future of POWER program?
  - Changes in ARC priorities---e.g., Related to infrastructure, health care access
  - Too much focus on ARC and EDA—limited knowledge or connection to other agencies and partners.
- **Limited Expertise in dealing with new recovery/resilience challenges**
  - How to deal with COVID impacts in sectors like hospitality
- **Effective Story Telling in a Crowded Policy Marketplace**
  - Urban vs. rural---urban provides more “bang for the buck.” How to maintain focus on rural needs.