



Statewide Planning Grant Case Study

Louisiana:

*Building a Sustainable Planning
Ecosystem*

Key Takeaways

- The Statewide Planning Grant functioned as a catalyst for Louisiana Department of Planning and Budget (LDPB) to collaborate across multiple entities, including Louisiana Economic Development, Economic Development Districts (EDDs), and Local Planning Commissions.
- Enhanced collaboration has led to more robust conversations and working groups that span a multitude of policy areas centered around resiliency.
- The connections made have helped groups, like the Louisiana Grid Initiative Working Group, access both state and federal funding opportunities.

Introduction

Louisiana's Statewide Planning Grant came at an inflection point for state and local alignment efforts. While the state has a functioning Economic Development District (EDD) ecosystem, there was no state-level department with a planning competency to organize and cooperate with EDDs.¹ EDA's Statewide Planning Grant allowed the Louisiana Department of Planning and Budget (LDPB) to revitalize its planning operations and devote a full-time position dedicated to planning within the new "State Planning and Resilience Office" (SPRO) while cooperating with Louisiana Economic Development (LED) to open communications with Louisiana's EDDs. At the same time, LED entered the CREC Policy Academy— giving the organization the impetus they needed to develop stronger relationships with EDDs. Between the Statewide Planning Grant and the Policy Academy, Louisiana was able to reconnect EDDs with LED and, in turn, connect them directly to LDPB.

While the focus of LDPB's planning grant was to develop a statewide capacity-building and resiliency plan, the grant also built a system of cooperation which had been absent in Louisiana for many years. Moreover, LDPB began institutionalizing both the added planning capacity through the SPRO and the relationship with LED and EDDs through regular communications and Memorandum of Understandings (MOUs) between the state level organizations and LDPB's Local Planning Commissions and EDDs in their regions.

Project Summary

The objective of LDPB's planning grant is to develop a capacity-building and resiliency plan and to build out LDPB's planning capacity through a new full-time planning position. The funding created the State Planning and Resilience Office (SPRO) that is under the Commissioner's Office within the Governor's Division of Administration Office of Planning and Budget. Acting as a pretext for planning

¹EDDs in Louisiana use a variety of organizational names including, but not limited to, "Planning Commissions" and "Planning and Development Districts." This report refers to them as "Local Planning Commissions."

across numerous state agencies, the office will play a pivotal role across many policy areas. The establishment of the office unfolded in three phases: convening stakeholders to assess current capacity for resiliency planning, developing an analysis of needs and opportunities, and ultimately crafting an overall framework for resilience planning capacity. Tapping into local relationships, the office tasked a regional economic development nonprofit—the Center for Planning Excellence—with laying out the framework and developing reports that indicate the progress of each phase throughout. Both the strategic plan and planning position are set to focus on climate and grid resilience, building partnerships across state agencies (like LED), and to create a statewide sector-based vision for economic development.

In Louisiana, costly natural disasters are increasing in both frequency and severity. To prepare for and recover from these disasters, LDPB is using some Statewide Planning Grant funding to guide local long-term plans and coordinate with other state agencies and with EDDs to connect them to resources at the federal and state level. The new planning position is designed to coordinate with EDDs/Local Planning Commissions and to promote resiliency as a component of economic development, generally.

In the three years since its founding, SPRO is now at the forefront of the Louisiana Grid Initiative Working Group, consisting of groups like the Department of Natural Resources, the Public Service Commission, and the Department of Environmental Quality. Together they look for funding opportunities to bolster grid and climate resilience. Having secured \$40 million from the United States Department of Energy, they are searching for additional funding opportunities within the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Emphasizing that the working group is mission focused, rather than application focused, the goal is to implement a similar structure across many different target initiatives.

Additionally, SPRO is working with two metropolitan planning organizations (MPOs) and other entities, like the Water Institute of the Gulf, to formulate a Louisiana Climate Action Plan. Stemming from the Climate Pollution Reduction Grant (CPRG), SPRO will take the lead in driving this initiative. SPRO established another working group so that stakeholders can coordinate application submission. With momentum underway, SPRO seeks to sustain progress, exploring potential projects involving Louisiana State University, planning commissions, and other stakeholders. The new initiatives brought about by the Statewide Planning Grant have invigorated LDPB to begin fostering connections from the state down to the local level. Reforged relationships in Louisiana have institutionalized resiliency planning and reinforced actionable policymaking.

Alignment Spotlight

“We [LDPB] have really talked about us partnering to build some of those bridges where there is a disconnect between the regional entities and the state.”

Louisiana’s state and local alignment efforts operate through two primary channels: LDPB and its relationship with Local Planning Commissions, and LED and its relationship with the EDDs. Before the State Planning Grant, both state agencies operated independently, administering programs through their local partners in parallel but without coordination. With the establishment of a planning employee at LDPB, and catalyzed by a new strategic plan, the agencies are now communicating and coordinating efforts. The grant has incentivized EDDs and other local organizations to create MOUs and partner together in furthering broader strategic objectives.

– LaKeshia Hart, the Louisiana Department of Planning and Budget

This work would not have been possible without the added support of the Policy Academy, which helped EDDs and LED establish the trusting relationships needed to address important economic development issues and promote economic development.

Roadblocks and Areas for Improvement

LDPB faced staffing challenges which led to obstacles in project handoffs. However, the most significant challenge has been coordinating with EDDs. Acknowledging the evolving nature of the relationship, LDPB recognizes the crucial need for intentional connections with EDDs. For example, LDPB highlighted the importance of strong coordination on infrastructure projects which built relationships throughout the organizations.

Federal Linkages

The establishment of SPRO is recent, so its place in the economic development landscape is still solidifying. Despite this, SPRO is clear about its objective — to facilitate connections between EDDs and other relevant organizations with suitable state and federal resources. As an illustration, the Grid Initiative Working Group is actively locating resources under the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) and Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA) dedicated to enhancing grid resilience efforts.

Lessons Learned

Louisiana’s State Planning Grant project offers several lessons learned for other states and EDA for potential future capacity grants.

- While developing the Statewide Planning Grant strategy, LDPB interviewed several employees from other state planning offices to guide their process. By soliciting input from other states, LDPB was able to hasten the development of their planning position.
- Through coordination with the Governor’s office, LDPB formalized their planning competency into statute. LDPB owed this success to close relationships between the governor and the LDPB Commissioner.

- With only three years to spend their grant, LDPB identified sustainability as an immediate concern. In interviews, LDPB made it clear that institutionalizing the SPRO in state government was vital to the success of their grant.

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