

Strategic Plan
for
Kennebec Valley Council of Governments
KVCOG

2024 – 2029

JUNE 25, 2024

Adopted by the KVCOG General Assembly on June 24, 2024

Executive Summary

Introduction. The purpose of the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments (KVCOG) is to provide a blueprint for Staff and Board of Directors work over the next five years. It is meant to guide planning decisions, inform budgetary discussions, funding searches, and guide staff alignment as KVCOG works to advance regional programs, projects, and services on behalf of its member communities. The plan will provide sound data support, provide ongoing technical assistance to communities in need and further regional collaboration.

This Strategic Plan clarifies the purpose and direction of KVCOG during the period of 2024-2029. The plan was developed using a conventional and issues-based strategic planning model. The plan was facilitated internally by the Executive Director and overseen by the Executive Committee and Board of Directors at KVCOG.

This process looked at the organization and the region with the outcomes being goal areas. Aligning priorities with the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) was important for cohesiveness. The plan focuses on a few specific priority areas in order to achieve an impact. Because financial and human resources are limited, the goals are realistic and measurable.

This strategic plan has been updated from the previous five-year plan. There has been significant change in leadership and staffing as well as Board membership that is reflected in this plan update. Staff, Board members and outside organizations all had input into the document.

This is a general plan that provides for flexibility and adaptability to a changing economic and political environment. This document is a flexible document that will be a valuable tool for the organization. It will be reviewed annually and updated as needed. This document is not a work plan with details and specific tasks, etc. The components and direction are solid and have the ability to be adjusted and changed when necessary.

The Board of Directors will monitor implementation of the Plan.

Mission, Vision and Values

The following statements are relevant to the entire time span of this Strategic Plan.

Mission Statement

KVCOG is a leader for local and regional economic development and planning. We support and expand the capacity of local government within the Kennebec Valley region.

Vision Statement

KVCOG is a valued partner of local and county governments, providing high quality and cost-effective professional services to build a resilient local economy. KVCOG maintains and develops capacity to meet the region's changing needs.

Values Statement

KVCOG believes in providing professional, knowledgeable, reliable and valuable services and resources. KVCOG values integrity, respect, credibility and adaptability in all endeavors.

Core Functions

KVCOG's Articles of Incorporation cite the following core functions:

- 1) Study of governmental problems common to two or more members of the Council as it deems appropriate including, but not limited to, matters affecting health, safety, welfare, education, economic conditions and regional development;
- 2) Promote cooperate arrangements and coordinate action among its members;
- 3) Make recommendations for review and action to its members and other public agencies that perform functions within the region;
- 4) By appropriate action of the governing bodies of the member municipalities, exercise such other powers as are exercised or capable of exercise, separately or jointly by the member governments and necessary or desirable for dealing with problems of local concern;
- 5) Accept funds, grants, gifts and services from the government of the United States or its agencies, from the State or its department, agencies or instrumentalities, from any other governmental unit, whether a member or not, and from private and civic sources to carry out its purposes;
- 6) Undertake such other actions as provided in the Bylaws for the Corporation and which are permitted by Councils of Governments under the laws of the State of Maine, including the borrowing of money.

Strategic Priorities and Measures of Success

Organizational

- **Organizational Stability**

KVCOG must maintain and enable a talented, motivated and productive staff to generate the impacts and results expressed in this Strategic Plan. Preservation and turnover of personnel should have limited impact on the performance of KVCOG due to capacity building through cross training and steady professional development.

- **Succession Planning**

In order to create a climate for effective succession planning at KVCOG there are certain best practices to adopt:

Firstly, maintain the established performance review process for key roles to be able to continually assess and reshape the roles as the needs and priorities of KVCOG that will change over time. An important part of this is to keep position descriptions up-to-date to ensure that day-to-day duties and overarching goals are fully understood, and are kept in an accurate, written record.

The main tool is to offer cross training and clarify back-up personnel for key activities completed by KVCOG's team members to prepare the team for temporary succession solutions (e.g., in the event of an unplanned departure in which staff must take on certain duties).

KVCOG will utilize a collaborative succession planning approach, allowing the relevant staff members to participate in the search and hiring process for their own staff colleagues. Team-based hiring enables KVCOG to seek and select new hires based on the perspectives of our team members, and also encourages the recruitment of new staff members who are truly welcomed and approved by many of their soon-to-be peers. This helps cultivate feelings of positivity and ownership among staff while reducing stress associated with staff transitions.

If an Executive Director is leaving KVCOG –whether planned or unplanned departure—it is recommended that one or more of the KVCOG team members collaborate with the Board of Directors (with the exiting ED participating if possible). A similar approach should also be used when planning the transition of any staff member. Existing staff should collaborate to facilitate informal, candid team discussions about the KVCOG’s near future and shifting personnel priorities, using questions like:

Is the staff member’s position description up-to-date? Are there other critical responsibilities or personal qualities that the individual brought to our team, that are NOT listed in the position description? (If the answer is ‘yes,’ be sure to update the position description.)

What elements of the role should remain the same in the distant future? What elements need to change based on our internal and external environments and any opportunities or challenges that lie on KVCOG’s horizon?

Are there any special considerations for the role based on other personnel / skill gaps that exist within the staff? Are there any other personnel gaps in our team that could potentially be filled or be partly filled by a single new hire? How might this type of role be structured or developed? As we begin the search process, how will we support the departing staff member’s role in the interim? What are the critical responsibilities that should be delegated to other members of our team for the time being?

Will the departing staff member personally be available to help onboard the new hire? If not, how will we capture and share the institutional knowledge needed to provide the new hire with a solid foundation during onboarding? If so, how can we ensure a positive and productive experience for both the exiting and incoming individuals?

As we identify candidates for the role, how do we foresee this transition occurring? What can we do now to ensure that a smooth, positive transition occurs? Are there any gaps we need to address in our screening/hiring processes or our onboarding/training programs?

KVCOG should rely on the intimate knowledge the staff have of the organization. Leverage our team to cross-train each other and volunteer as backups, to manage staff transitions, and to seek out new colleagues who truly embody the spirit of our mission.

Measure: Tools are created, and a system is identified and implemented.

- Staffing of core functions – Planning, Economic & Community Development, Environmental Services, Business Financing

The success of the succession planning described above should facilitate that all core functions of the organization are met even with potential staff and leadership turnover. Having an Executive Director in place that understands all of these core functions is essential so that they can hire good, well-performing staff members. The Executive Director must also work to maintain staff and move swiftly to fill positions when that become open.

Measure: A document that outlines core functions is created, and staff with the necessary skills is in place.

- Financial stability

KVCOG should aim to increase as much as possible revenues from non-grant sources as well as producing positive impacts from proactive investments. Maximizing membership and dues model is one way of achieving this although it is inherently limited by historic pricing structures and number of available communities as members.

KVCOG must also be cognizant of expenditures and try to maximize direct billable hours from all staff members, including leadership. Relying on charging too much to the unrestricted dues fund and overhead is not sustainable.

KVCOG should constantly look for ways to minimize our financial liabilities, particularly from loan programs.

Realistic annual budgeting and continual monitoring of financial status through the year is essential.

Finally, all staff must be tasked with looking for income / funding opportunities at all times that align with our core functions and enhance services to our member communities.

Measure: Revenue streams are consistent, and new funding opportunities are identified.

- Program evaluation/review

All of KVCOG's current programs should be reviewed periodically to make sure they:

- 1.) Continue to meet the goals and mission of KVCOG
- 2.) Are appropriately staffed and resources to deliver a high quality service
- 3.) Are not financially damaging to KVCOG
- 4.) Improve in scope and quality over time wherever possible

New programs should be considered where there is an identified need from our Region / Communities and should be considered by the same criteria above.

Measure: Tools are created, and reviews and evaluations are completed for all programs in order to maintain effective services and introduce new services as necessary.

Regional

- Planning Services

KVCOG continues to provide premiere planning service across the region in all areas and is able to anticipate future needs and respond proactively.

Measure: Number of projects and plans worked on, local contract revenue generated.

- Work towards progress on all the Drivers for Success identified and described in our most recent Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS)

(https://www.kvcog.org/images/CEDS_Final_FINAL_Online_Version_2022-2027.pdf)

- Industry Clusters
- Entrepreneurship and Innovation
- Workforce Development and Higher Education
- Access to Capital
- Infrastructure
- Environment
- Leadership
- Resiliency

Measure: Statistics of Economic growth through the CEDS process

Results

As a result of implementation of this Plan, our organization will have achieved the following benefits:

- A stable organization providing valuable services to our members and the region.
- An organization that anticipates and responds to the needs of the region and local communities.
- An organization respected for its leadership and expertise by its members and partner organizations.
- A region actively working to improve the economic climate of the Kennebec Valley.

Positioning of Our Organization

Our Core Competence

KVCOG hosts a professional staff with a breadth and depth of knowledge that can provide planning assistance, project development, grant writing and administration, economic development expertise, workshops and training and facilitation services to our members and the region. We are a nimble organization that responds quickly to members' needs and requests and provides guidance during changing economic conditions. KVCOG works both locally and regionally to achieve local results.

Our Unique Value Proposition

KVCOG was created in accordance with 30-A M.R.S.A. §2301 to develop regional policies, services and solutions to meet local needs. Recognizing the demands upon local governments, we find solutions that will assist municipalities in achieving their goals without creating an added burden upon taxpayers. We offer a membership that provides substantial savings in many ways: through KVCOG's joint purchasing program, which saves numerous municipalities more than half of their membership fee; through shared services and collaborative efforts; and through long term planning, facilitation and other services that municipalities need and may not have the capacity to provide. We are able to leverage our members fees to have five time more funding available for our services.

KVCOG operates as a 501(C3) corporation, making us eligible for many grants and programs that assist our members specifically, and improve the region overall. With a view to benefit our entire regional, we have formed partnerships with other organizations to obtain funding and implement improvements for our member communities.

Action Plans

Detailed action plans will be put into an Annual Operational Plan (AOP) that is updated annually. Each of the items in this operational plan will have a separate detailed action plan including the resources needed, persons responsible and the timelines for actions to be completed. This is a working document intended to track and record progress.

Annually the priority areas will be reviewed. The work plans that are incomplete will be carried over into the next annual plan; any new information will be added as appropriate. During this annual review period, measurements will be reviewed and progress will be determined.

Monitoring, Communicating, Adjusting and Updating the Plan

Monitoring Implementation of the Plan

Each of the goal areas will have measurements to track progress. In addition to outcome measurements, resources necessary to reach those goals will be identified. Aligning the goal areas and the Annual Operating Plan with the annual budget will complete the strategic planning package, fully enabling informed and effective decision making for KVCOG.

Status of implementation of this Plan will be reviewed as follows:

Responsibility	Frequency	Reported To
Executive Director	Quarterly	Board of Directors or Executive Committee
Staff	Monthly	Executive Director (ED)

Communicating the Plan

Stakeholders	What to Communicate to Them	Who is Communicating or How
Membership/General Assembly	Mission, vision and values; and strategic priorities	ED through direct mailing, email and newsletter
Board of Directors	All of the Plan and status of priority action plans	ED through updates at Board meetings
Employees	Mission, vision and values, strategic priorities and relevant action plans	ED through staff meetings and one-on-one staff discussions
Partners/Collaborators	Mission, vision and values; and strategic priorities	From Board of Directors and ED Through email and newsletter
Executive Director	All of the Plan and Status of Action Plans	From the Board of Directors Reports from employees
Executive Committee	Mission, Vision and values; strategic priorities; and assigned action plans	From the Board of Directors
Funders	Mission, vision and values; results of strategic analysis; strategic priorities and financial plans	From Board of Directors through ED
Everyone	Mission, Vision and Values	As part of marketing strategy

Annual Review and Measurements

Each year during the five-year period of the Strategic Plan, an annual review process will be completed before the end of the fiscal year. During this review, measurements will be updated to track progress. This information will be communicated to the Board of Directors. During this review period, any adjustments or updates to the strategic plan or to the AOPs will be completed and presented to the Board for approval.

Adjusting the Plan

The following procedure will be used if adjustments are required to the Plan.

1. A need for an adjustment to the Plan is noticed, and the reason for the adjustment is suggested, along with suggested new wording for the Plan.
2. If the suggested adjustment is to the mission, vision, values or strategic priorities, then the Board of Directors decides if the adjustment should be made or not. If the adjustment is approved, then the revision date of the Plan is changed and recorded in the Revision Page of this Plan.
 - a. The Board will also assess if any key stakeholders should be apprised of the change, including forwarding an updated version of the Strategic Plan to those key stakeholders.
3. Otherwise, if the suggested adjustment is to an AOP, it will be articulated to the Executive Director. If the adjustment is approved, then the revision date of the AOP is changed.

Updating the Plan

This plan is a five-year plan. A review process to update the entire plan will begin prior to the end of year five. The process will be determined, and a new committee will be formed to assist the Executive Director with the planning and oversight of the update.

Board of Directors Authorization of Strategic Plan

On behalf of the KVCOG Board of Directors, I hereby indicate that we have reviewed this Strategic Plan and endorse the Plan as the official and current Plan for the Kennebec Valley Council of Governments for the period of 2024-2029 as voted on at the _____ - General Assembly Meeting.

KVCOG Board of Directors President: _____

Date: _____

Appendices

Appendix A: Overview of the Organization – History, types of clients, programs/services, major successes, org chart

Appendix B: Process Used to Develop the Strategic Plan

Appendix D: KVCOG Membership Guide