

## Sustainability Directors Looks Ahead

### Energy Supply, Demand, and Transportation Feature Among USDN Members' Current Top Sustainability Priorities Over the Next 3 to 5 Years

*It has been said that climate change is the most pressing issue of our time. USDN members look ahead to target the high-emission fields of energy and transportation system transformations.*

Holding the title of Sustainability Director in local government often proves to be an uphill battle when making the case for funding initiatives. The urban sustainability field is the sum of multiple low and high profile changes adding up to substantial collective impacts over time. It is hard to make the case for sustainability work that can operate in the background of the community's consciousness (LED streetlights, building retrofits, and adaptation planning, for instance) when large capital projects and essential services (like police and fire) are competing for funding from the same sources. For this reason, USDN members are continuously looking ahead to achieve the highest value and impacts with the triple bottom line of equitable social, environmental, and economic health in their communities.

In the USDN 2017 Member Impact Survey, members were asked to identify their top three opportunities for impact over the next 3 to 5 years. While some priority areas have remained constant over the years, some interesting shifts are beginning to emerge. The survey found that:

- Energy supply, energy demand, and transportation are the most common opportunities for future impact
- Transportation and equity are emerging priorities, more commonly cited as future actions than past successes

Although energy demand is still a top priority, it is mentioned less often for future impact than it is when celebrating past work. Figure 1 shows a comprehensive look at responses by topic.

USDN members note energy supply as the top area of interest for future opportunities within the urban sustainability field. The survey captures a closer look at what members are focused on in the energy supply sector. General renewable energy work is first, with the more specific renewable energy procurement second as future action areas. Thermal decarbonization and community solar were also noted as areas of interest for future impact. Figure 2 identifies future energy supply action areas in order of priority.

Work in the energy sector has long been a top priority for municipal sustainability directors. This is due, in part, to ambitious climate goals many must meet. Energy use is often a first and long-term target area, because it has a direct link to greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, offers relatively standardized and quantifiable data to track progress and impact, and is not housed as a responsibility of other city departments.

# Sustainability Directors Look Ahead

## ENERGY SUPPLY, TRANSPORTATION, AND ENERGY DEMAND WERE THE MOST COMMON OPPORTUNITIES FOR IMPACT

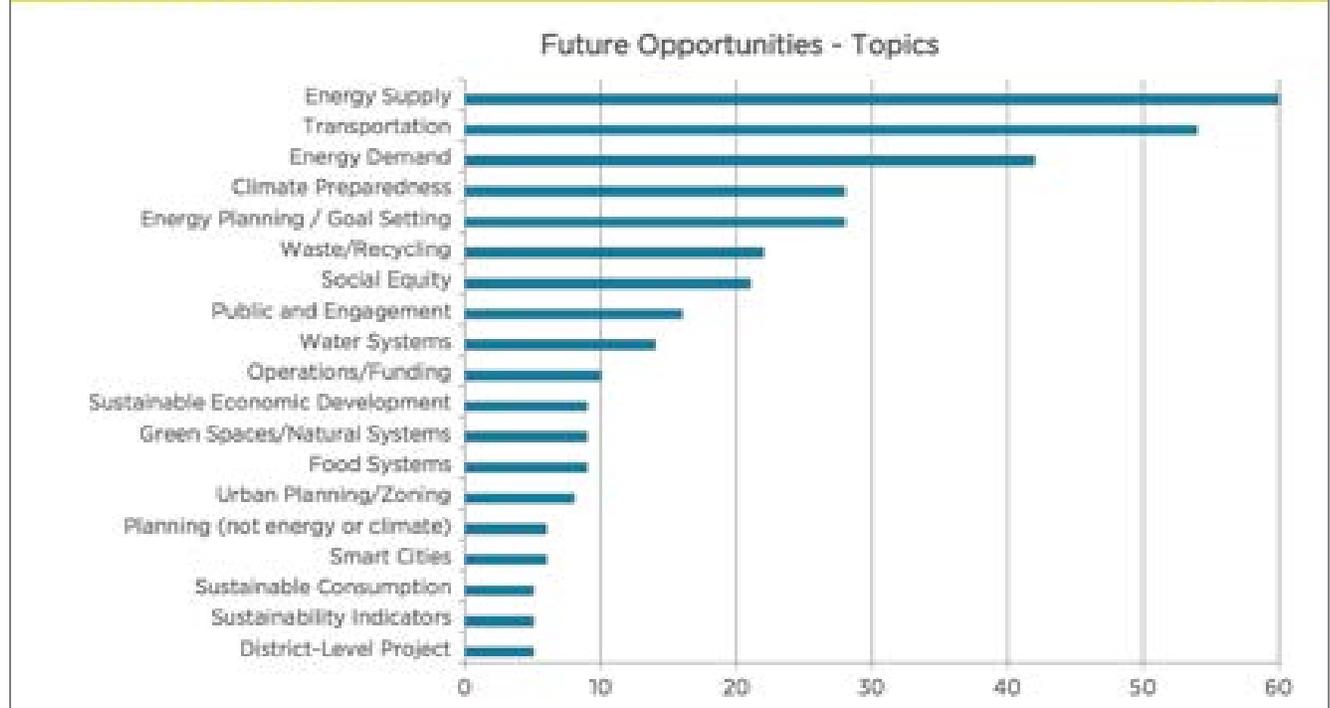


Figure 2: Topics Identified for Future Opportunities by USDN Members

## WITHIN ENERGY SUPPLY, RENEWABLE ENERGY PROCUREMENT AND COMMUNITY SOLAR WERE COMMONLY CITED FUTURE AREAS FOR IMPACT



Figure 1: Future Action Areas of Interest in the Energy Supply Sector

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While the energy sector continues as the principal focus of the field in 2017, substantial interest in transportation, climate preparedness, waste/recycling, and social equity are emerging among USDN members. These topics of interest are different in that they lack the same level of standardization and adoption as the energy sector. Sustainability initiatives in these sectors do, however, offer a more holistic approach to creating meaningful change in communities. It will be interesting to see how this shift in member priorities to encompass a broader range of topics will shape the field of sustainability in the future.

When the respondent results for 2016 past successes and future opportunities in the next 3 to 5 years are evaluated side by side, some interesting shifts are revealed in the direction of urban sustainability. The following are observations about these trends:

- Energy initiatives still hold strong at the top of the list of member focus areas:
  - While energy supply work has maintained a high level of interest amongst members, energy demand interest has dropped off from its 2016 levels.
  - Even with this reduction in interest, energy demand still ranks third as a priority area in the next 3 to 5 years.
- The transportation sector showed the largest shift between past and future interest with the topic now being ranked second for future opportunities.
- Members also showed a substantial increase in interest in social equity, second only to transportation in terms of growth.
- Other areas that members are prioritizing in the future are climate preparedness, climate / energy planning, and GHG reduction planning.

With the topic of energy holding the primary focus with members, specific priority areas within this topic are analyzed to uncover trends in member interest. Below are some observations about changes in member energy priorities. For instance:

- Renewable energy production remains the primary focus of members and is gaining interest for future opportunities.
- There has been a substantial jump in member interest in general energy efficiency and thermal decarbonization in future opportunities.

For opportunities in the next 3 to 5 years, members predict that USDN will have at least an important contribution to 80% of future opportunities for member impact (compared with 55% for past successes). This shows that USDN members are reaping tangible benefits from their participation in the network. USDN will continue to adapt to the changing landscape of the field of urban sustainability and offer support to its members as they move their work forward. USDN support is wanted most in these two areas:

- Members see the greatest opportunity for USDN impact in the areas of climate preparedness and climate/energy planning.
- Most members want continued access to peers through USDN, while also identifying more tailored opportunities like access to technical assistance and document best practices.