DDAA Strategic Plan

The Development District Association of Appalachia (DDAA) represents 73 Local Development Districts (LDDs) serving the 420 counties of the Appalachia Region. The mission of the DDAA is to strengthen the capacity of the region's LDDs and member governments as local partners to the Appalachian Regional Commission (ARC) in its federal-state-local partnership. At the core of the DDAA mission are two fundamental principles.

(1) Local governments and communities can achieve more by working together than individually and
(2) LDDs are instrumental in promoting a regional and holistic approach to community and economic development.

The DDAA accomplishes its mission by:

- Supporting a dynamic working partnership among federal, state, and local governments within Appalachia;
- Providing quality networking and training to improve the skills and enhance efforts of LDDs and ARC to serve the Appalachian region;
- Communicating and advocating a vision for the Appalachian region;
- Developing organizational resources to strengthen the LDDs and the region; and
- Promoting DDAA capabilities to its network of stakeholders.

On August 10, 2015, the DDAA Board conducted a strategic planning retreat to identify priorities for the next two to five years. Through this exercise several key assets were identified, on which to build a strategy. Challenges that could hinder future success were also discussed.

DDAA's Core Assets

- The expertise within the LDD network
- Geographic diversity of DDAA's leadership and membership across 13 states
- The collaborative relationship among members of the network
- The common interests and development philosophies among leaders in the ARC region
- The relationship (and influence) of LDD members with local policymakers
- The enthusiasm among the network about Appalachia as an investment opportunity
- The willingness among the network to mentor new members
- The perception of DDAA as a hub of the network
- The opportunity to share ideas and best practices afforded by the annual conference and training
- The strength of ARC's contribution to DDAA and its LDD members
- The unanimity of support (in terms of membership) for DDAA
- The diversity of activity (and funding sources) among the LDD members

DDAA's Critical Challenges

- The relative importance of ARC's mission to broader national priorities
- Changing national priorities and their implications for ARC and LDD funding
- Disparate community and economic development interests of urban and rural areas in Appalachia
- Lack of strong connection between some LDDs and DDAA
- Lack of engagement with state development agencies in DDAA
- The consistency of communication across the network, especially to the general membership and to the states
- Reluctance to embrace change within the network
- High turnover in leadership in the LDDs (and the potential loss of institutional memory about DDAA that results)
- Limited visibility of DDAA
- Lack of resources and staff to support DDAA
- Competition with other associations and volunteer activities
- Reliance on ARC and the implications for DDAA's funding stability (or potential growth)

Association Operations and Activities:
Opportunities and Priorities by Category

Following are six broad categories of activities that DDAA undertakes. Within each activity category, the board identified several potential opportunities that they felt were most worthy of undertaking **that would guide DDAA activities during the next several years**. The board was then asked to rate the opportunities within each category in order to identify the most important priority. That highest priority is highlighted in each category.

1. Managing and governing DDAA
   1.1. Diversify funding base (58% of board members rated this the highest priority in this category)
   1.2. Hire staff/expand staff capacity (33%)
   1.3. Reach out to foundations (9%)
   1.4. Other ideas
      1.4.1. Establish a DC Headquarters for DDAA

2. Conference and related activities
   2.1. **Tweak programming for annual/NADO conference (52%)**
   2.2. Conduct deep-dive meeting for directors and staff (42%)
   2.3. Consider new conference location (outside DC) (6%)

3. Training
   3.1. Provide base 1-2 trainings per year (50%)
   3.2. Provide additional customized or contract training (31%)
   3.3. Provide virtual training, e.g., webinars, etc. (19%)

4. Membership Services
   4.1. Communicate with members (52%)
   4.2. Identify new member services, e.g. blog (21%)
   4.3. Membership retention, esp. inactive members (12%)
   4.4. Communicate with state program managers (12%)
   4.5. Reach out to new LDD Directors (3%)

5. Advocacy for ARC and Appalachian Region
   5.1. Advocate for ARC (55%)
   5.2. Expand Federal advocacy beyond ARC (33%)
   5.3. Coordinate with ARC's communications office (12%)
   5.4. Other ideas include:
      5.4.1. Cooperate to promote a regional Appalachian brand
      5.4.2. Expand advocacy to encourage foundations to invest in Appalachia

6. Technical Assistance
   6.1. Identify and share best practices (82%)
   6.2. Facilitate on-site peer exchanges (18%)
      6.2.1. Organize peer visits to districts to conduct focused topic-driven peer exchanges

Implementing the 6 Key Priorities: Tactical Approaches

The DDAA Board identified preliminary implementation strategies for the highest priority item identified within each of the six categories. Below is the detail for each strategy within the six broad categories.

1. Management and Governance
   1.1. **Diversify funding base (beyond its current funding sources, e.g., membership, conference, training, and ARC grant)**
      1.1.1. Engage in more external fundraising
         1.1.1.1.   Develop one or more project concepts
         1.1.1.2.   Explore potential grant funding for DDAA to help LDDs work together across state boundaries
2. Conference and related activities
   2.1. **Tweak programming for annual/NADO conference to incorporate more DDAA-specific programming and more training into the overall conference content**
      2.1.1. Tasks to be accomplished in the near future
         2.1.1.1.   Establish a DDAA committee to provide content input and continuity of planning
         2.1.1.2.   Develop a process for gathering feedback from DDAA members on how to structure the DDAA activities to minimize conflict with the NADO meeting and develop more clearly defined activities
         2.1.1.3.   Develop a better time alignment with the NADO meeting and coordinate with the caucus meeting
         2.1.1.4.   Provide programming content on the Monday of the conference that aligns with the NADO theme but is distinctly DDAA
         2.1.1.5.   Create sessions that serve as a 'higher level primer' for DDAA leaders
         2.1.1.6.   Diversify conference funding to recruit sponsorships, promote parallel programming, and prepare for threats to ARC

2.1.2. Longer term opportunities (five-year timeframe)
  2.1.2.1.   Explore opportunities for expanding training
  2.1.2.2.   Examine potential technology enhancements to expand the conference experience
2.1.3. Other priorities
  2.1.3.1.   Develop a survey to ask members (and board members) about their strengths and interests to use as a basis for identifying potential topics and presenters
  2.1.3.2.   Publish conference highlights/handouts/materials on the website
  2.1.3.3.   Develop advocacy tools/handouts that are LDD specific to provide to members (e.g., take photos at the 'On the Hill' event)

3. Training
  3.1. Provide base 1-2 trainings per year
    3.1.1. Engage staff to support the basic training (either via contractor or employee)
  3.2. Provide additional customized or contract training
    3.2.1. Conduct a membership survey to identify topics (e.g., employment law, GIS, finance, etc.)
    3.2.2. Engage members in helping to identify training topics or in developing training
    3.2.3. Conduct one deeper-dive meeting per year focused on a training topic (either as a ½ day at the conference or as a special 'one-off' training workshop)
      3.2.3.1.   Decide on target audience (e.g., executive directors or others)
      3.2.3.2.   Determine the business model (e.g., fee for service and/or location of meeting)
      3.2.3.3.   Survey the membership on key topics (e.g., employment law, GIS, finance, agricultural product tracking)
      3.2.3.4.   Develop curriculum that incorporates best practice examples

4. Membership Services
  4.1. Communicate with members
    4.1.1. Increase on-going communication with membership (two year priorities)
      4.1.1.1.   Survey how the members would like to receive information and what would engage them
      4.1.1.2.   Coordinate with ARC communications person on messages from ARC
      4.1.1.3.   Share the DDAA minutes with members
      4.1.1.4.   Develop a DDAA communications strategy (with help from a communications expert)
      4.1.1.5.   Enhance social media (Facebook/Twitter) and website to encourage member feedback
      4.1.1.6.   Produce email newsletter highlighting projects (including best practices)
      4.1.1.7.   Provide opportunities for members to feed information for the newsletter
      4.1.1.8.   Develop a Membership Packet
    4.1.2. Five year priorities
      4.1.2.1.   Produce a DDAA Annual Report
      4.1.2.2.   Develop a DDAA video

5. Advocacy for ARC and Appalachian Region
  5.1. Educate policy makers about the importance of ARC
    5.1.1. Develop one-page talking points fact sheet
      5.1.1.1.   Identify DDAA legislative priorities and action plan
      5.1.1.2.   Develop an ARC fact sheet (with external help) that includes information about ARC investment impacts (updated semi-annually)

      5.1.2. Raise legislative awareness

           5.1.2.1.   Conduct meetings with legislators (including at the annual meeting and at other times as appropriate)

           5.1.2.2.   Collaborate with ARC and project applicants to develop project notifications for legislators that includes LDD as a resource about the projects

      5.1.3. Increase public awareness of ARC by educating constituents

           5.1.3.1.   Engage with ARC to enhance an understanding among LDDs about the role of state coordinators

           5.1.3.2.   Ensure that project notifications are highlighted in local LDD newsletters

           5.1.3.3.   Produce press releases on individual projects (coordinating LDD efforts with ARC's communications director)

6. Technical Assistance

   6.1. **Identify and share best practices**

      6.1.1. Conduct peer to peer marketing to DDAA members to identify potential best practices

      6.1.2. Develop a database of best practice profiles

      6.1.3. Build a website as a tool for sharing best practices/documenting/organizing

      6.1.4. Conduct innovation awards to identify best practices

      6.1.5. Maintain a blog on new ideas, including a discussion feature

      6.1.6. Develop relationships with partner organizations (e.g., NADO, IEDC, EDA, etc.) to identify potential best practices