

## Midcoast Council of Governments

### Strategic Plan Outline

#### Proposal

**Introduction.** The Midcoast Council of Governments held a series of planning retreats in the fall of 2021. That report is attached. One of the recommendations is for the development of a Strategic Plan for the organization and region. The following is an outline of a proposed process presented for review.

**Strategic Plan Process.** Staff, in conjunction with Board members and the General Assembly, will conduct a 4-part Strategic planning process. The process is aimed at providing a 5-year strategic plan for the organization. The phases are described as follows:

- **Phase 1. Subregional forums.** 4 Subregional forums will be held in the Knox/Waldo County Area (coast), the Lincoln County Area (coast), the southern district, and the rural communities north of Route 1. These will be in person meetings, consisting of both elected and professional representatives, including members of the MCOG Board of Directors and General Assembly from that region. The session will include the following:
  - A staff presentation on information and trends in the subregion
  - Staff facilitated SWAT analysis
  - Priority rankings
- **Phase 2. Subregional forum follow-up.** The subregional group will review of the priority summaries, as organized into primary topic or issues areas. The group will assess each topic in terms of the actions needed and who should be responsible for implementation. They will be asked to score priority rankings again. Links to existing programs, such as the Comprehensive Economic Development plan for the Economic Development Administration, the new housing Opportunity Program, the Community Resiliency Partnership, or similar existing programs, will be made.
- **Phase 3. MCOG Action Plan.** The action plan will be drafted by staff, reviewed by the Executive Committee and presented to the general assembly (including subregional components). The components will include:
  - The action
  - Financial resources needed to implement the action
  - Responsible parties
  - Agency specification, where appropriate
  - Time Frame
  - Benchmark

The Assembly will be asked, through a scoring process, to rank the actions within the action plan in terms of priority, within the 5 year time horizon. The ranking session will be

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proceeded by information sessions that will help address some of the key issues and actions identified in the plan.

- **Phase 4. Approval, Board of Directors.**

Still to be considered:

- Venues
- Invitations lists
- Direct communication strategy
- Dates and timing
- Tweaks to the process outlined above

Attachment 1: Board Retreat Report

***RECOMMENDATION 1: ADOPT THE FOLLOWING GOALS FOR 2022-23***

1. **Develop a more proactive stance on project development through the development of a strategic regional plan within one year of hiring a new executive director.** The plan would be brief – only two-three pages, with very high-level goals. It would be prepared through extensive consultation with member communities and counties. It would also set metrics for achievement so that there would be accountability. It would also identify partner organizations that would play important roles in meeting the goals.
2. **Develop a more active and involved Board of Directors.** Provide an orientation to new members. Involve staff in meetings. Have board members self-identify the skills that they can bring to the organization. Have photos of board members (and staff) on the organization web site.
3. **Achieve a more balanced work program:** regional and local projects, economic development and planning projects, large and small municipalities, low and high technical assistance users.
4. **Communicate what the organization is about, what it is accomplishing, how it relates to regional challenges.** This involves creating an up-to-date and informative web site, periodic email blasts, social media, a more lively annual meeting, and more personal contact.
5. **Build the skills and capacity of the organization.** Broadband, affordable housing, climate change, are among the issues facing the region; staff should be either trained in such areas directly or have engaged the assistance of other area organizations with the needed resources and skills to address leading issues.
6. **Become more successful in obtaining and implementing federal, state, and foundation grants.** Build the budget and staffing of the organization.
7. **Create and approve a technical assistance policy.** Technical assistance is a positive activity for a regional organization. It gives staff experience; it exposes rural communities to the benefits of planning and economic development; it generates money to support staff; it creates relationships of trust that improve the prospects of the organization to elicit cooperation for regional goals.

But the activity also raises issues. For example, does the technical assistance rate pay the full cost of the services, or are other communities subsidizing technical assistance activities

through their dues?<sup>1</sup> If there is such a subsidy, is that desirable or not? Do all communities have equal access to technical assistance, or do some members not even know it is available? Is the benefit spread broadly among communities, or concentrated among only a few members? Should there be a certain number of hours of technical assistance provided free to member communities, or should charges be levied immediately? Should non-member communities in the region have access to technical assistance, and if so at what cost? These are the types of issues a policy should address.

8. **Develop an in-house capacity to handle organizational finances.**
9. **Hire an energetic new executive director who can effectively implement the above goals.**

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<sup>1</sup> Former director Bill Najpauer estimated that the full cost of one staff person is about \$100,000. If so, it would take an hourly rate of about \$50 to break even.

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***RECOMMENDATION 2: CHANGE THE ORGANIZATION'S NAME***

**BY-LAWS ARTICLE I NAME**

The name of this organization shall be the Midcoast Council of Governments (known as MCOG).

## ***RECOMMENDATION 3: REVISE MISSION STATEMENT***

### **ARTICLE III MISSION**

The mission of MCOG is to strengthen the capability of member municipalities and counties to act individually and collectively to make Midcoast Maine a better place to live, work, and play.

This involves:

- Developing and implementing a regional economic development strategy;
- Identifying, developing, and implementing regional strategies for other pressing issues and opportunities;
- Mobilizing resources in the region, including member municipalities and counties, business and economic development organizations, environmental and conservation nonprofits, schools and research laboratories, and others, to implement regional strategies;
- Providing technical assistance to municipalities and counties to effectively design and implement planning and development policies;
- Advocating at the state level for policies and funding that support regional and local planning and development strategies;
- Exercising other such powers as member municipalities and counties may delegate.

## **RECOMMENDATION 4: REVISE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR JOB DESCRIPTION**

### **Executive Director Midcoast Council of Governments (MCCOG)**

Executive position responsible for the organization's leadership, strategic direction and operations.

**MCOG** advances the economic development interests of Mid Coast Maine – including Knox, Lincoln and Sagadahoc Counties, and portions of Cumberland and Waldo Counties. **MCOG** communities share a common purpose – to strengthen municipal government while combine resources for meeting regional challenges beyond individual capacities. **MCOG** facilitates communication and coordination among communities, shared pursuit of economic opportunities, and delivery of programs and services.

The Executive Director reports to a Board of Directors and works closely with its Executive Committee. ~~The Executive Director manages a team of 3 full-time employees, occasional contract assistance, and a budget of \$400,000.~~

### **Responsibilities**

- **OVERSEEING THE DEVELOPMENT OF A high-level strategic plan.** Developed in collaboration with the Executive Committee and updated annually, the strategic plan for the organization should clearly articulate organizational goals, objectives, related actions, and metrics for measuring progress. The first plan should be in place within **ONE YEAR** ~~6 months~~ of hire. **THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SHOULD OVERSEE THE PLAN DEVELOPMENT, BUT ALSO BE A PARTICIPANT IN SETTING GOALS AND STRATEGIES.**
- **A high functioning team.** The Executive Director is responsible for developing and leading a group of people with specific roles and complementary talents and skills and creating an organizational culture that would inspire the staff to a common purpose and seek high levels of collaboration and innovation to produce superior results. The Executive Director oversees all other human resources functions and ensures compliance with applicable laws and regulations.
- **Value-added programs and services.** **MCOG's** future depends on developing a maintaining a portfolio of programs and services that deliver value to communities in the **MCOG** region. A core responsibility is to oversee the preparation of the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) – a federally funded planning process designed to guide the economic prosperity and resiliency of an area or region; the CEDS is updated annually. Current programs and services also include a portfolio of economic development loan programs, planning services, and group purchasing.
- **Financial resources.** the Executive Director is responsible for ensuring sufficient resources for meeting organizational needs, managing associated relationships, and delivering clean annual audits. The organization currently runs on a combination of financial contributions from the counties, and soft money from grants. The Executive Director prepares the annual work plan and budget and receives all funds of **MCOG** .

- **Day to day operations.** In addition to people leadership, financial oversight, and office management, the Executive Director is responsible for ensuring timely compliance with all regulatory and reporting requirements and will prepare, issue and review requests for proposals to obtain services as authorized by the Board of Directors.
- **Strategic communications.** Success in this position depends on strong communication – with the Board and its Executive Committee, with funders, and with communities in the MCEDD region. The Executive Director will develop and use a strategic communications plan as a guide to organizational communications, including (at a minimum): preparing agendas, reports and related materials for committee and board meetings; basic collateral describing **MCOG** projects and services available to municipalities in the **MCOG** region and associated fees if any; quarterly updates (minimum) to counties and communities in the **MCOG** region on value-added projects and services provided; responding to an annual report and associated financials; updates and reporting to grantors and donors; and an up-to-date website.
- **Provide direct and fundable services in the areas of planning and/or economic development. Because this is a small organization, for the short term at least, the Executive Director will need to provide planning and/or economic development services that can be reimbursed either from local governments or grant sources.**

## Skills and experience

### Required:

- A proven track record of bringing people with diverse perspectives together around common goals.
- Demonstrated success building high functioning teams.
- Progressively responsible experience managing people and organizations.
- Demonstrated success with financial management – including revenue forecasting, financial reporting, and clean annual audits.
- A history of successfully winning and managing federal and state grants and managing associated federal and state compliance.
- Excellent communications skills at all levels.
- **Experience in one or another of the fields of municipal planning, municipal economic development, regional planning, or regional economic development**

### Desired:

- Progressively responsible **AND RELEVANT** experience with economic development and city or regional planning.
- Demonstrated success building programs and organizational capacity.
- Experience marketing services.
- Strong project management.

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## **Other**

The Executive Director is a full time, salaried position that involves work in an office setting. Occasional in-state and out-of-state travel is required.

### **Working Conditions:**

**Normal office environment. Minimum physical effort required. Operations of office machines such as computers and photocopiers are routine. Must have ability to travel to meetings across the region.**

MCOG is an equal opportunity employer.

***RECOMMENDATION 5: ADD LANGUAGE TO BYLAWS ABOUT HIRING AND CONFLICT OF INTEREST***

**ARTICLE VII STAFF**

**Section 3. Personnel management**

- a) **The Executive Director shall be responsible for the hiring, supervision, and all other personnel functions with regards to the organization's staff.**
- b) **The Executive Committee shall be responsible for hiring, supervision, and all other personnel functions with regards to the Executive Director.**
- c) **All hiring processes shall follow written protocols and fulfill equal opportunity hiring requirements.**

**ARTICLE VIII FINANCES**

**Section 6. Conflict of Interest. Members of the Board of Directors shall annually sign the conflict-of-interest policy statement as adopted by the Board of Directors.**

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***RECOMMENDATION 6: EMPOWER A SUBCOMMITTEE TO DRAFT BY-LAW LANGUAGE FOR COMBINING THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS AND EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE INTO ONE 13-17 MEMBER BODY, AND FOR SIMPLIFYING MEMBERSHIP REQUIREMENTS FOR THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS.***

The subcommittee was appointed at the retreat, and consists of Sally Costello, Bill Post, Julie Hashem, Andy Hart, and John Shattuck.