

TDC Organizational Assessment Recommendations

With MAPC Responses

TDC Recommendation:

TDC's recommendations address key issues brought up by both internal and external stakeholders. In order to further strengthen MAPC's functioning, TDC recommends that MAPC:

- Establish and maintain a focus on priorities;
- Build infrastructure and systems to catch up to the agency's recent growth;
- Create an infrastructure that can fully support the agency's entrepreneurial practice;
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration;
- Rethink and strengthen MAPC's approach to evaluation, knowledge management and community engagement;
- Work on equity; and
- Clarify the role of the subregions.

MAPC has in many cases begun to respond to these issues, so the recommendations that follow often represent a continuation of the work MAPC has already initiated. TDC further recognizes that MAPC needs to come up with a plan for prioritizing and addressing these issues over time, given financial constraints, including specific limitations on the amount that the agency can spend on salaries and overhead.

MAPC Response:

MAPC has experienced significant growth over the past decade, and the staff has doubled to approximately 75 people. Our budget has grown correspondingly, in both direct operations and pass-through funds, mainly to cities and towns. We are now covering many more issues of concern to the region, such as clean energy and public health.

Many of the issues that are identified in the organizational assessment reflect "growing pains" of success. We appreciate the opportunity to pause during this organizational assessment and strategic planning process to figure out how we can organizationally catch up with that growth.

**TDC Recommendation:
Establishing and Maintaining Priorities**

Internal and external stakeholders alike noted that MAPC needs to focus its broad mission in order to maximize the agency’s impact. Strategic priorities developed through the planning effort and guided by the findings of this assessment have been articulated in MAPC’s new strategic plan and endorsed by MAPC’s Executive Committee and the full Council.

TDC recommends that MAPC think carefully about how to remain disciplined and advance these priorities. As the agency develops more specific objectives around the strategic priorities over the coming few weeks, MAPC must determine how the priorities drive decision-making, be it ongoing project work or the pursuit of new projects. MAPC must think about when and how to say “no” to projects which are not priorities. MAPC also needs to focus its annual work plan around the priorities, determining how the work of every department and division will evolve in response to the new strategic plan. As the strategic plan bridges the gap between the agency’s short-term and long-range plans, MAPC should also continue to think about how to update *MetroFuture* in the context of the new strategic plan.

MAPC Response:

Concurrently with this organizational assessment, MAPC completed a 6-month strategic planning process that involved our governing officials, staff members, and other stakeholders. In October, the MAPC Council adopted a 5-year strategic plan that focuses on smart growth planning with an emphasis on housing, transportation innovation, and transit-oriented development; an explicit focus on equity; a robust effort toward municipal collaboration, efficiency, and effectiveness; and a new focus on comprehensive climate mitigation and adaptation strategies. We are excited to pursue that strategic vision.

We have a track record of successfully executing strategic plans. For example, five years ago, we outlined a plan to help our municipalities enter the green era, and with the support of the Barr Foundation, MAPC now proudly houses one of the most effective clean energy divisions in the country, with proven results saving both millions of dollars and lowering greenhouse gas emissions in demonstrable ways.

We will set out to accomplish as much with our new strategic goals. First, we have convened staff teams to lay out clear objectives and measurable outcomes. All of our departments and divisions considered these goals as part of their annual work plan development for FY 16.

Six months into the next fiscal year we will review the implementation of the FY16 work plan in order to assess our progress in meeting our strategic goals and objectives and have assigned staff “stewards” to each of the goals. Additionally, this spring we will begin the process of updating the Metro Future implementation strategies to see if there are modest changes to the Metro Future goals or objectives that are necessary as a result of our new strategic plan.

Moreover, we are committing resources to these goals. Because we successfully increased our municipal assessments by almost \$600,000, we have awarded technical assistance grants based on a Request for Proposal with a selection filter that highlights our four strategic priorities. Separately, many projects funded by District Local Technical Assistance (DLTA) and a new Barr Foundation grant of \$450,000 are also designed to further our strategic priorities.

TDC Recommendation:

Infrastructure and Systems

As the agency has grown, infrastructure and systems haven't kept up, and MAPC's entire staff, including the Executive Director and Deputy Director, acknowledge the need for systems enhancements. Many improvements have taken place or are already in process. TDC recommends that the agency focus its continued efforts in the areas of finances, technology, human resources, and internal communications.

Finances

MAPC should continue to make the agency's finances more transparent to the board, staff, and public. To bolster internal financial capacity, TDC endorses MAPC's goal to procure and implement a new accounting system, including its intent to switch in fiscal year 2016 and to include robust staff training, particularly for managers. The new system should improve communication between the Finance division and project managers, allow MAPC to manage projects more efficiently, and enable the agency to locate and solve problems more quickly.

TDC recommends that MAPC further enhance its financial stability by increasing the organization's reserves. MAPC's leadership recognizes the need to build the agency's operating reserve to protect the agency from unexpected funding losses or other revenue stream interruptions. The most variable parts of MAPC's operating budget are foundation support, local technical assistance contracts, and federal contracts. A reserve in the vicinity of \$500,000 would allow the agency to mitigate the risk of changes to these funding sources. A risk capital fund of \$200,000 would likely also be appropriate. This fund would allow exploration and proof of concept for

new projects at MAPC before external funding is sought. These reserves will not only increase financial stability but also enhance MAPC's continued ability to be entrepreneurial. To generate support for establishing these reserves, MAPC must educate staff, the Executive Committee, and others about the need for and benefit of these funds. However, TDC recognizes that an incremental approach may be required given the constraints of public funding and other circumstances.

MAPC Response:

MAPC is committed to both continued progress in financial management and transparency. Together with our sister agency CTPS, we have purchased a comprehensive accounting system that includes a robust project management module as well as automated timesheets, shifting from our current use of Tenrox. The system will allow integration of all facets of our work and, we hope, eliminate redundant work that is caused by operating with separate accounting and timesheet systems. It will also allow for more real-time communication between Finance and project managers as they seek to manage their individual project finances. Finally, it will give us the information we need to track and understand the finances of individual projects, allowing us to scope future projects more accurately and to manage project resources more efficiently, reducing overruns of time and money.

MAPC agrees that we should prepare for negative contingencies by developing more financial reserves. After several years of negative or break-even budgets, MAPC has been on a run of positive budgets for the last 12 years, and we have built a much stronger cash position and fund balance. We will, however, begin a discussion with the Finance Committee and Executive Committee on the idea of increasing our reserves and establishing a risk capital fund over a five-year time horizon, within the statutory and political constraints that face all public agencies in Massachusetts.

We also plan to continue to improve the transparency and training around financial protocols so that new project managers have a clearer understanding of financial protocols and procedures, and so they will struggle less with budgets, project management, purchase orders, and staff allocations.

TDC Recommendation:

Technology

MAPC needs to continue to invest in technology to support its work. TDC heard about a variety of technology issues to be addressed, and recommends that priorities should be set among these issues to address them over time as budgetary constraints allow.

MAPC Response:

We are committed to having robust technology available to our staff and clients, and to ensuring system reliability. Current or planned projects include adding capacity and redundancy to our Internet service, completing an outside network audit, and, finally, developing a disaster recovery plan for the agency. Instead of adding new IT staff, MAPC plans to use consultants to complete targeted projects for the agency.

TDC Recommendation:

Human Resources

MAPC recently looked carefully at human resources issues with Third Sector New England (TSNE). TSNE recommended the addition of a Human Resources Manager; TDC endorses this recommendation, given the size of the staff at MAPC, CTPS, and the MetroWest Regional Collaboration, all of which are part of the MAPC “corporation.” TDC further recommends that the Human Resource Manager job description and salary support the hiring of a seasoned professional with significant experience. The hiring of a talented Human Resources Manager should allow MAPC to enhance professional development efforts, improve staff orientation and enhance communications around human resources issues.

MAPC Response:

MAPC has hired a senior, full-time Human Resources Manager. The manager will help enhance professional development, improve staff orientation, and enhance communications around human resources issues. We are augmenting this individual's capabilities by hiring both a part-time benefits and a part-time payroll staff.

TDC Recommendation:***Internal Communications***

MAPC's leadership recognizes that the organization's growth has made internal communications more challenging and that continued internal communications improvements are needed. TDC recommends that MAPC strengthen internal communications structures around human resources and personnel communications (facilitated by the new Human Resources Manager); financial procedures; entrepreneurial practice; and intra-agency project awareness.

MAPC Response:

MAPC, through its new Human Resources Manager, will strengthen internal communications structures around human resources and personnel communications. As we implement the new accounting software, we will put into practice new financial procedures that include robust training and ongoing assessment.

We will continue to emphasize the importance of pursuing new projects and new lines of work, consistent with MetroFuture and our strategic priorities, and seek to make our entrepreneurial practice transparent to our staff through ongoing training and the encouragement of our department and division heads.

Finally, we have already begun to take steps to make sure that all staff have access to an understanding of current projects, especially when someone else's project could influence the work of other staff or their interactions in the field. We are particularly focused on ensuring that all subregional coordinators know about projects in their own subregions, and have an opportunity for input and influence.

TDC Recommendation:
Entrepreneurial Practice

MAPC is a state agency that has increasingly built an entrepreneurial practice, but has not yet built adequate systems to support and enhance this practice. TDC recommends that MAPC strengthen the systems and protocols to support its entrepreneurial work.

TDC Recommendation:
Business Development Support

MAPC's current business development process relies on entrepreneurial staff identifying and pursuing appropriate opportunities. It is clear that the relevant staff appreciate and enjoy these opportunities and that this approach has yielded significant results for the organization. It is also clear that most of these staff members are working well above and beyond their core responsibilities in order to pursue these efforts.

TDC and MAPC have discussed how best to build in additional supports for these efforts. We considered the prospect of providing additional support for staff via the establishment of a Practice Manager position; however, MAPC staff did not feel that such a position would be helpful at this time. The relevant MAPC staff members noted that they wish to continue to drive the process, and that much of the framing and writing of proposals requires very specific expertise. However, it appears that some support could be offered, particularly in packaging and producing proposals and supporting materials, that does not require such specialized expertise. TDC recommends that MAPC continue to refine how this might best be structured. One prospect that TDC and MAPC have discussed would be to provide this support via the internal communications team. Given how stretched the internal communications team already is, this additional responsibility would require enhanced capacity in this department.

MAPC Response:

MAPC has decided not to hire a Practice Manager, but instead to split up the three tasks that would have been in that job and assign them to different existing staff, with backfill hiring as appropriate. Those three tasks are enhanced business development/proposal assistance, knowledge management and best practices, and an improved ability to monitor and manage planner assignments.

A staff member in the Communications Division has been given a new title and new responsibilities to monitor new business opportunities, offerings, and RFPs and communicate those to appropriate staff; to develop generic materials for inclusion in proposals, and to tailor these materials to specific applications; and to assist staff in developing proposals. She has undertaken this new role with enthusiasm, and we are optimistic about the success of this endeavor.

We are refining the mandate of the Regional Plan Implementation Department, and considering a name change that communicates knowledge management responsibilities.

The department will evaluate useful models from other parts of the country (and the world), maintain contacts as appropriate with professional organizations, help MAPC staff to choose areas where our work can be enhanced or expanded (consistent with the strategic priorities), and then work to incorporate these efforts into professional development and hiring. Furthermore, the department will continue its efforts to evaluate MAPC projects both for client satisfaction and impact related to MetroFuture and our strategic priorities. We have made good progress in designing new evaluation protocols, and we are now working to expand them to all MAPC departments and projects.

Finally, the directors of smart growth planning departments are working together to develop a matrix of available staff resources, and they are coordinating their efforts to assign staff in ways that will be more effective and transparent. We are hopeful that this improved coordination will help staff to understand the assignment process more fully, and to attain projects that move them in directions that are consistent with their professional goals.

TDC Recommendation:

Strengthening Systems and Protocols

TDC recommends that MAPC should clarify which staff will be managing projects and should then help build the skills of those managers and provide them with a set of systems through which to handle this responsibility. MAPC should provide its project managers with training and a set of clear procedures in the following areas:

- Identifying which projects to pursue, and which not to pursue;
- Scoping and budgeting projects;
- Managing project staff;
- Tracking and managing projects and project budgets;
- Setting up metrics for evaluating project performance that build on MAPC's growing evaluation prowess; and
- Ensuring consistency among projects, *MetroFuture*, and strategic priorities.

TDC recommends that MAPC rethink how projects are scoped and budgeted in order to reflect the true costs of the project and deliver an even higher quality product. MAPC should also develop standards for project budgets so that budgets build in the following components:

- Administrative support;
- Project management;
- Community engagement, whenever appropriate;
- Communications; and
- Resources for final reports, including graphic design.

Developing and using these standards will have the added benefit of helping to cover some of these costs through project budgets rather than simply via overhead.

TDC also recommends that MAPC aim for fewer, larger projects. Such projects have the potential for greater impact, are more likely to allow for interdisciplinary or regional collaboration, and are more likely to be financially viable. While much of MAPC's work is dictated by the needs of individual municipalities, its entrepreneurial practice can and should focus on fewer projects that make a greater impact. TDC recognizes that MAPC will need to continue to undertake some smaller projects, and urges MAPC to be selective in selecting which of these smaller more discrete projects it takes on.

MAPC Response:

In response to this assessment, MAPC has already started to offer best practice workshops on scoping, budgeting, project management, and working with external partners. We are committed to giving many staff members the opportunity to manage projects, but we need to develop the systems and supervision to guide staff members in those responsibilities. In addition, as described earlier, we are committed to continuing a new focus on project monitoring and evaluation, including analyzing the impact of our projects on progress toward MetroFuture.

The regional plan already included indicators for regional performance, and our regional indicators work is creating baselines so this progress can be tracked. We have developed scoping and budgeting guidelines will help project managers to avoid under-scoping, and to include work related to engagement, communications, graphic design, and administrative support. At the same time, not every project can include all of these elements. Although we will always do a certain number of smaller projects, we are committed to doing more major projects with more robust budgets to have more impact, with more interdisciplinary aspects.

TDC Recommendation: Interdisciplinary Collaboration

As MAPC's entrepreneurial practice has grown and its scope of work has expanded, the agency frequently has opportunities to work across departments and program areas. MAPC has made progress in promoting interdisciplinary collaboration, and has identified interdisciplinary practice as a priority approach in its strategic plan. In TDC's estimation, this provides a platform to continue more purposeful and frequent interdisciplinary efforts.

MAPC should enhance its practices to promote interdisciplinary work. With larger budgets on major projects, the agency should continue to consciously build interdisciplinary teams. To further enhance the development and structure of these teams, TDC recommends that MAPC create a Smart Growth Planning learning and practice group with a particular focus on the agency's strategic priorities. MAPC might consider having key staff rotate and share the opportunity to chair the work of this group. The Smart Growth working group should invest in speakers, professional development and training, and could be used as a way to highlight best practices and new trends from the field. Further, the Smart Growth working group could help MAPC enhance its ability to achieve *MetroFuture* goals.

While MAPC values interdisciplinary approaches, the agency's leadership is also cognizant of the reality that building interdisciplinary project teams can become expensive. By investing in professional development as detailed above, and encouraging staff to be purposeful in thinking in a broader way, MAPC will be able to build the ability of its staff to look at issues more holistically across disciplines. Hopefully, this broader perspective can then be infused into many projects, even those that do not have the benefit of a larger interdisciplinary project team.

MAPC Response:

Over the past 10 years, MAPC has become increasingly interdisciplinary in its approach to its work, and the organizational assessment underlines the need to continue and enhance that direction. To that end, our major project budgets will invest in interdisciplinary teams whenever possible, and we will consciously build teams across departments and divisions.

The staff of the Land Use, Environment, Transportation, Public Health and Energy teams, along with representatives from Regional Plan Implementation and Data Services, began meeting together to discuss collaboration on projects several years ago. Collectively known as the "Smart Growth staff," this group has already begun to enhance inter-departmental planning projects. We intend to redesign the current Smart Growth staff meeting into a Smart Growth Planning and Learning Cluster. We will invest in speakers and professional development, and aim to turn this meeting into an opportunity to promote cutting edge and cross-cutting planning techniques. The RPI department (again, new name possible) will take over responsibility for this cluster.

TDC Recommendation:

Rethinking Evaluation, Knowledge Management, and Community Engagement

Evaluation and Knowledge Management

MAPC has increasingly recognized the importance of evaluating the region's progress toward achieving MetroFuture goals and indicators, as well as evaluating the agency's progress toward its own goals and priorities. The agency continues to strengthen its capacity for this important work, including the recent internal evaluation of projects undertaken during the course of the Sustainable Communities program. Evaluation will continue to be an important component of MAPC's work in the future.

The need for knowledge management was raised during the course of this assessment by a number of stakeholders. MAPC's rapid growth has resulted in an ever-expanding knowledge base which can serve as an important resource for staff and municipalities. As MAPC seeks to continue to be innovative and forward thinking, it is important that the agency build in ways to disseminate emerging best practices from both outside and within the organization in a purposeful and systematic manner.

Recently, evaluation efforts, and, to a lesser extent, knowledge management, have largely been carried out via the Regional Plan Implementation Department. This department was in large measure also responsible for carrying out the work of the Sustainable Communities grant. TDC heard some internal stakeholder confusion about the role of this department. TDC recommends that MAPC reframe the role of this department to explicitly focus on evaluation, project tracking and knowledge management in the immediate future; the department might also play a role in updating *MetroFuture* and leading the next regional visioning effort over the longer term. To this end, we recommend renaming the department and calling it Knowledge Management and Planning.

Community Engagement

As noted earlier in this assessment, MAPC has increased its focus on community engagement with the hiring of two community organizers who bring a different complement of skills than the planning staff. Some internal and external stakeholders suggested that MAPC should continue to build on this progress, and infuse this approach into more of its projects.

To date, the community engagement staff have been a part of the Regional Plan Implementation Department. TDC recommends that MAPC revisit this, in light of the evolution of the RPI Department. In the future, the community engagement staff's place in the organizational chart should reflect how that approach might best be infused into project work. That might occur via the creation of a new division, the integration of community engagement work into the work of the communications department, or perhaps another approach.

MAPC Response:

MAPC will enhance our commitment to knowledge management and focus this work in RPI, as described earlier. That department will focus on knowledge management, evaluation, project tracking and community engagement. RPI will also maintain responsibility for stewardship of the MetroFuture plan, updating its implementation strategies, and preparing for the next generation of MetroFuture revisions. We are still considering whether that will involve a more robust editing and adjustment of MetroFuture, or the creation of a new plan.

Although there is an understandable desire to tie community engagement more closely to the planning departments, we feel that RPI provides the best place for engagement under our current structure. MAPC is deeply committed to community engagement – bringing an organizing mentality to our planning work. We have recently promoted our longest-serving community engagement specialist to manager status, in part to demonstrate our commitment to this work.

TDC Recommendation:**Equity**

MAPC is committed to addressing equity in the greater Boston region: the agency prepared and released its State of Equity in Metro Boston report in late 2011, along with a set of regional equity indicators. In 2014, it released a comprehensive policy agenda to accompany those indicators. Furthermore, the organization has identified equity as a strategic priority, and TDC recommends that MAPC continue to work on equity both internally and externally in order to support this strategic priority.

MAPC needs to refine what a strategic focus on equity means in its external work. This could involve continuing to identify and engage with diverse partners, thus broadening MAPC's circle; refining techniques that promote meaningful participation among diverse audiences; and using equity as a filter to help select and scope projects and evaluate organizational impact.

Internally, MAPC should continue to build on the platform it has established for promoting internal equity. The agency should persist in its efforts to build a governing body and staff that broadly reflects the diversity of the region, and should continue to support the work of MAPC's internal equity committee. The agency should invest in ongoing equity training for staff. TDC does not believe that MAPC needs an equity staff person at this time; rather, the agency should work to weave equity into the fabric of the agency and its work.

MAPC Response:

MAPC recently adopted equity as one of our four strategic priorities. We of course plan to continue to work toward internal equity goals, including a diverse staff, diverse Council and Executive Committee, and an inclusive environment. From an external perspective, we are currently reviewing potential objectives to our external equity goals. These include bringing an equity lens to the selection of projects we choose to pursue and also to how we approach those projects. We have already established equity as a criterion in the assignment of technical assistance resources. Furthermore, we have brought additional managers into the development and evaluation of individual project proposals so that more people have a say about what equity means, which projects will best advance this goal, and how we should strive to achieve our objectives.

TDC Recommendation:

Subregions

Stakeholders agree that the role of the subregions needs to be clarified and strengthened, and MAPC subregional staff have been meeting on this topic. TDC recommends that staff continue this work and decide on a consistent but flexible role for the subregions to play. MAPC should also make the role of subregional councils explicit. Since subregional staff identified subregional councils as a critical point of communication between MAPC and its member municipalities, clarifying this role will enhance the functioning of the subregions.

Once MAPC has clarified the role of subregions, a next step would be determining the characteristics of the desired membership of subregional councils: should the councils be composed of professionals or laypeople? Should they be comprised of planners or other municipal officials? Should membership be consistent across subregions? MAPC should communicate its expectations of the subregional councils both internally and externally.

Finally, MAPC should clarify the role of subregional coordinators. The agency should also clarify the amount of time expected of, and resources available to, these staff members. MAPC should also establish expectations about the working relationship between subregional coordinators and MAPC staff working on projects in those subregions. Enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration and internal communications should also help project staff and subregional coordinators establish a more productive working relationship.

MAPC Response:

MAPC will continue to emphasize and support the role of and be explicit about expectations of subregions and subregional coordinators both internally and externally. As part of this emphasis and support, MAPC will continue to coordinate discussions among Chairs of Subregional Councils and discussions with Chairs and Coordinators of Subregional Councils. Further, MAPC will evaluate the impact of Subregional Councils and determine a reasonable approach to allocating Assessment and Unified Work Planning Program resources for helping each subregion to achieve its annual goals and objectives in alignment with MAPC Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives. MAPC will hold discussions with Chairs of Subregional Councils and evaluate subregional impact. After this is complete, we will recommend one or all of following: restructuring of Subregional Councils, restructuring of resource allocation, or restructuring of subregional coordinator assignments.

TDC Recommendation:

MAPC has much to be proud of. With the recent development of its strategic plan for the years 2015-2020, the agency is poised for continued accomplishment in the four priority areas identified in the plan, as well as sustained progress in pursuit of the larger regional vision articulated in *MetroFuture*. TDC hopes that the findings and recommendations of this organizational assessment contribute to MAPC's continued success in pursuit of this ambitious and important work.