

Memorandum

To: Tracey DeSimone, Project Manager

From: Marjorie McRae and Meghan Bean, Research Into Action

Date: December 5, 2014

Re: RGGI Cleaner, Greener Communities Phase I: Wave 1 Research Findings

1.1. Executive Summary

1.1.1. Background

Through monies allocated from the sale of Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) CO₂ allowances, the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) currently funds the Cleaner, Greener Communities Program (CGC), which contains two phases: Phase I, the development of ten regional sustainable growth plans encompassing all of New York State, and Phase II, funding for projects that promote sustainability planning and sustainable development across the state's ten regions. Research Into Action (the research team) is conducting a process evaluation of Phase I of CGC. This memo provides preliminary findings from an initial wave of data collection, which sought to summarize the unique experiences of the planning regions and address key research questions guiding the evaluation.

1.1.2. Methodology

This analysis focused on a selection of five regions that represent the diversity of the state's ten regions: Central New York, Long Island, New York City, Southern Tier, and Western New York. The research team conducted in-depth interviews with program staff at NYSERDA and TRC, the program implementation contractor, as well as with individuals highly involved in the planning process in their respective region, namely planning leadership, highly involved staff and stakeholders, and technical consultants hired by the regions.

1.1.3. Narrative Overview

Interviews indicated that there was substantial stakeholder engagement in the Phase I planning process, as intended by guidance that came with the NYSERDA funds. Across the five regions, stakeholders were often "known" actors rather than individuals newly involved in sustainability planning and development issues, however. The design of the CGC program allowed the state to leverage both stakeholder interest in environmental issues and the desire for funding for local and regional projects. Stakeholders also were motivated by a desire to align themselves and their

plans with emerging political priorities. Among all five regions, recent and ongoing events, like natural disasters, natural gas exploration, and declining populations, are generating greater concern for and interest in sustainability and climate change.

Many region contacts described pride in their Phase I plans and felt that they were in a better position to meet their sustainability goals at the end of the planning process than they had been at the beginning. Feelings of empowerment varied from region to region, however. Contacts from downstate regions cited a long history of political leadership that supports sustainability planning and implementation and exhibited confidence in their ability to fund projects going forward. By contrast, contacts from upstate regions described varying levels of political and community will to commit resources to sustainability planning and sustainable development. Upstate contacts also reported that the plans lack effective advocacy and expressed disappointment that the Regional Economic Development Councils (REDCs) have not taken more ownership of the plans.

A number of factors affected regions' ability to create or implement their plans. Respondents in all five regions reported challenges related to the overlap of jurisdictions in discussions of land use, transportation, water, and waste management projects. Contacts reported instances where different jurisdictions had the opportunity to work together to reach common goals, but had difficulty determining which jurisdiction had the proper authority to propose and conduct a project, and which group or agency would take the lead and/or benefit from the project.

Many challenges were unique to the upstate regions, where pre-CGC sustainability planning tended to occur within individual municipalities rather than on a region-wide level. As such, contacts in the upstate regions described challenges with bringing stakeholders together from across the region, particularly from municipalities that had not been involved in sustainability planning before CGC. Respondents in upstate regions also expressed concern over the lack of professionals in rural areas available to contribute to and implement sustainability planning. Finally, upstate regions highlighted implications of an urban-rural divide; rural stakeholders wanted CGC plans to encompass goals that would grow industry and address economic development issues, while stakeholders from urban areas were more concerned about their region's ability to create projects directly related to sustainability.

Both program staff and region contacts noted that the planning and implementation of Phase I occurred on an "accelerated timeline," which had ramifications for regional planning process. Contacts from multiple regions reported that they engaged in duplication of effort to address guidance that was provided by NYSERDA after they had already completed work on aspects of their plan. Another consequence of the short timeline was that Phase II of CGC was not fully developed when Phase I occurred, and program staff were not able to provide the regions with specifics regarding how the Phase II funding process would be implemented. As a result, region contacts felt that they were investing significant time and resources into Phase I without knowing whether they were in a good position to receive funding from Phase II. The lack of specificity regarding Phase II also created confusion for some region contacts, who expected to receive guidance and support from NYSERDA during Phase II, but instead felt like NYSERDA was "hands off" once the plans were complete.

1.1.4. Key Findings and Recommendations

The findings of this initial wave of research reveal a number of opportunities for NYSERDA to help regions implement their Phase I plans and achieve their sustainability goals. Below are the two primary recommendations regarding ways NYSERDA can support the regions going forward.

- › **Provide opportunities for “ownership” of the plans.** CGC was effective in mobilizing stakeholders, creating intra-regional relationships, and encouraging the development of plans responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the state’s ten regions. Contacts expressed pride in and enthusiasm for their plans, and regions are poised to capitalize on the knowledge, infrastructure, and momentum cultivated during the planning process. NYSERDA can, and should, seize this opportunity to support the ongoing transformation of New York’s local and regional communities.

One challenge facing the realization of the plans is that there is no clear “owner” of the planning documents or a concrete strategy for how the plans will be managed over time. There are multiple ways NYSERDA might continue to capitalize on the achievements of Phase I, including: 1) Pursue opportunities to support implementation of the plans through the delivery or expansion of new NYSERDA initiatives; 2) Provide REDCs with additional funding and support to implement and track the plans; and 3) Develop a state-level program to oversee progress toward regional sustainability goals. These efforts will help NYSERDA and the REDCs meet their shared goals of achieving a more sustainable future, promoting economic development, and fostering regional collaboration.

- › **Highlight additional opportunities for funding.** NYSERDA designed the CGC program with the expectation that the Phase I plans would create opportunities for far more projects than could be supported through Phase II funding. Some region contacts expressed desire for additional guidance from NYSERDA on attaining funding for their projects. This sentiment is particularly strong in upstate regions that did not engage in region-level planning before CGC and that lack the professional workforce to engage in large-scale, long-term sustainable development. NYSERDA could provide guidance to regions through online resources or biannual meetings with interested REDC members or municipal staff. Potential sources of funding include the New York State Economic Development Fund, the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE), the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and state and federal Departments of Agriculture and Transportation.

1.2. Background

Through monies allocated from the sale of RGGI CO₂ allowances, NYSERDA currently funds the Cleaner, Greener Communities Program (CGC), which contains two phases: Phase I, the development of ten regional sustainable growth plans encompassing all of New York State, and Phase II, funding for projects that promote sustainability planning and sustainable development across the state’s ten regions. The research team is conducting a process evaluation of Phase I of

CGC with the goal of addressing seven research questions, which serve as the organizational structure for the “Research Questions and Preliminary Findings” section of this memo.

This memo provides preliminary findings from an initial wave of data collection, which looked at five of the state’s ten regions and included in-depth interviews with NYSERDA program staff, NYSERDA’s implementation contractor, TRC, and individuals highly involved in their respective region’s planning process.

In addition to outlining the research methods and sample disposition of this work, the goals of this memo are threefold: 1) Summarize the unique experience of each of the five regions included in the sample; 2) Address the seven key research questions guiding the investigation; and 3) Serve as a resource for NYSERDA and the research team to determine the most useful goals and appropriate data collection methods for the subsequent waves of data collection.

1.3. Methods & Sample Disposition

At NYSERDA’s request, the first wave of data collection focused on a selection of five regions. The research team strove to represent the diversity of the state’s ten regions by choosing five regions that vary along a number of dimensions, including demographic characteristics, carbon emission intensity, planning focus areas, and challenges to reaching sustainable development goals. The regions included in the analysis were: Central New York, Long Island, New York City, Southern Tier, and Western New York.

The research team interviewed 23 contacts between September 3 and October 15, 2014. Table 1 provides the number of contacts interviewed from each source (NYSERDA, TRC, and the five selected regions). The sample of region contacts included: planning leadership, highly involved planning staff and stakeholders, and technical consultants hired by the region. Table 2 provides the number of interview respondents in each category.

Table 1: Number of Contacts from Each Source Interviewed

SOURCE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
NYSERDA	3
TRC	1
<i>Total</i>	<i>4</i>
Central New York	3
Long Island	4
New York City	2
Southern Tier	6
Western New York	4
<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>

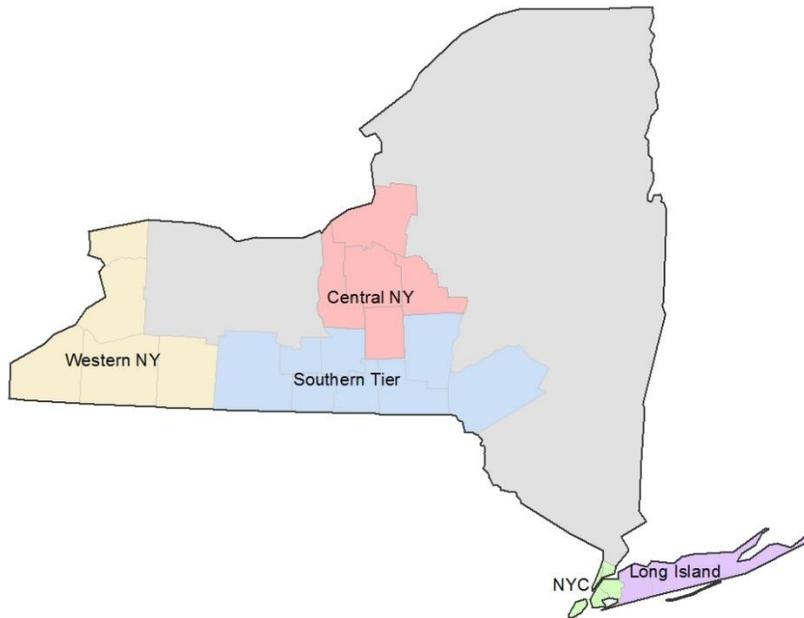
Table 2: Number of Each Type of Region Contact Interviewed

CONTACT TYPE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS
Leadership	7
Highly involved staff and stakeholders	5
Technical consultants	7
<i>Total</i>	<i>19</i>

NYSERDA provided contact information for their own staff and TRC staff. Contact information for regional planning representatives came from NYSERDA and TRC documentation, regions' implementation plans, and recommendations from respondents regarding additional contacts who would be able to provide insight on their region's planning activities.

1.4. Regional Snapshots

This section includes brief descriptions of the Phase I planning activities undertaken by each region as well as brief discussions of each region's post-planning implementation activities.



1.4.1. Central New York

Planning. The parties highly involved in Central New York's planning process were Onondaga County, the Central New York Regional Planning and Development Board (RPDB), and two technical consultants. Onondaga County was the applicant for Phase I funding, and their staff managed the grant and oversaw the entire planning process in partnership with the RPDB. To develop the region's goals and implementation strategies, the RPDB compared and combined

municipalities' existing planning documents and sought feedback from stakeholders and technical advisory groups. The RPDB had already begun supervising the region's greenhouse gas (GHG) inventory through NYSERDA's Climate Smart Communities program before the start of the CGC program and oversaw its completion during Phase I of CGC. The RPDB and the technical consultants all made significant contributions to the creation of the planning documents, with the RPDB managing the process and soliciting stakeholder feedback.

Implementation. The CGC Phase I plan is the first sustainability planning effort Central New York has undertaken as a cohesive region, and respondents reported interest in working to implement the plans. The RPDB is engaging in local planning efforts through both the Climate Smart Communities Program and Phase II of CGC. Additionally, the region is moving forward on several solar projects, including a regional outreach and training event aimed at educating local professionals about solar energy. Other solar projects in the region are receiving funding from a number of sources, including DOE, NYSERDA, and the Center State Corporation for Economic Opportunity.

1.4.2. Long Island

Planning. Several parties worked together in the planning process on Long Island: The Town of North Hempstead, Vision Long Island, the Long Island REDC, the Sustainability Institute at Molloy College, and two technical consultants. The Town of North Hempstead was the applicant for CGC Phase I funding and their staff shared project management responsibilities with a technical consultant. Vision Long Island managed stakeholder and public engagement with support from the Long Island REDC and the Sustainability Institute at Molloy College. The planning team leveraged existing community partnerships to create stakeholder working groups early in the planning process. A technical consultant sought input from the working groups to prioritize goals and implementation strategies then conducted the bulk of the work on the planning documents.

Implementation. Several organizations on Long Island are implementing projects that support the goals outlined in the sustainability plan. For example, the Town of North Hempstead received Phase II funding for a compressed natural gas station, and an inter-jurisdictional electric vehicle (EV) charging station project has pending Phase II funding. Several wastewater treatment projects that will mitigate nitrogen contamination also are in the process of receiving funding from various governmental agencies.

1.4.3. New York City

Planning. The organizations primarily involved in New York City's planning process were the Mayor's Office of Long-Term Planning and Sustainability and two technical consultants. The Mayor's Office applied for the Phase I funding, oversaw coordination of the consultants, and wrote the bulk of the plan. Staff at the Mayor's Office developed the region's goals and implementation strategies, using the Mayor's "80 by 50" (80% carbon reductions by 2050) plan as a framework. The Mayor's Office also worked jointly with a technical consultant to organize a

large stakeholder scoping event at the outset of the planning process and solicited input from technical working groups and other stakeholders later in the process.

Implementation. New York City’s Phase I plan was completed at the end of former mayor Michael Bloomberg’s administration. The current mayor, Bill de Blasio, is leading implementation of multiple projects in line with CGC goals that also support New York’s “80 by 50” plan and his own “One City Built to Last” initiative. Projects include an energy efficiency upgrade program for low-income community buildings, a project to install solar panels and EV charging stations in parking lots, and a biogas pilot program, all of which are funded through Phase II of CGC. A private company is also installing a 47-acre solar array in a former landfill on Staten Island.

1.4.4. Southern Tier

Planning. The parties highly involved in the Southern Tier region’s planning process were the Tompkins County Planning Department, the Southern Tier Central RPDB, the Southern Tier East RPDB, and a technical consultant. The Tompkins County Planning Department was the applicant for CGC Phase I funding, and they coordinated the planning team and oversaw creation of the planning documents at a high level. The Southern Tier Central and East RPDBs solicited feedback on the region’s goals and implementation strategies from stakeholders and the general public, and the technical consultant facilitated stakeholder engagement events and incorporated stakeholder feedback into the sustainability plan. The technical consultant also was responsible for the bulk of the project management and production of deliverables.

Implementation. Several organizations are beginning to implement projects that support the goals outlined in the region’s sustainability plan. For example, Tompkins County received funding from Phase II of CGC for an EV feasibility study. At least one other project, a residential solar program, is moving forward with financial support from a local philanthropic organization. Additionally, local private businesses are pursuing other projects outlined in the region’s sustainability plan, such as biomass heating and wind farms.

1.4.5. Western New York

Planning. Parties involved in Western New York’s planning process were Allegany County, a consortium of county and municipal staff from each of the region’s seven counties, a lead technical consultant, and a sub-consultant. Allegany County was the applicant for Phase I funding. The consortium worked closely with the technical consultants to recruit and engage stakeholders, seek public input, form technical working groups, and develop the region’s goals and implementation strategies. The consortium also guided creation of the planning documents, with the technical consultants doing the bulk of the technical writing.

Implementation. Several organizations are planning and implementing projects that support the goals proposed in the region’s Phase I plan. For example, a local college is installing a 12-acre, 2.5-MW solar array, with a private investor covering upfront costs. Allegany County also has received Phase II funding for a comprehensive planning forum that will help municipalities

compile local comprehensive plans. Regional stakeholders have created the Western New York Sustainable Business Roundtable, which is receiving money from the EPA to encourage more environmentally responsible business practices. Regional players also have conducted feasibility studies regarding food hubs, which aggregate and distribute local produce, and plan to seek funding in the near future.

1.5. Research Questions and Preliminary Findings

This section provides the research team’s Wave 1 preliminary findings, organized in terms of the seven research questions guiding the evaluation.

1.5.1. What factors serve as catalysts for and barriers to stakeholder engagement?

Interviews indicated that there was substantial stakeholder engagement across regions, as intended by the guidance that came with the NYSERDA funds. New opportunities for cooperation inspired and excited stakeholders. Across the five regions, stakeholders were often “known” actors rather than individuals newly involved in sustainability planning and development issues. On Long Island and in New York City, for example, many stakeholders were employees of government agencies or non-profits with existing carbon reduction missions. In the Central New York, Western New York, and Southern Tier regions, planning leadership solicited input from individuals they already knew to be interested in sustainability. One respondent reported, “...we needed representation from multiple stakeholder groups, so we called on people we’d worked with before.”

The design of the CGC program allowed the state to leverage both stakeholder interest in environmental issues and the desire for funding for local and regional projects. Respondents in two regions reported that concern for sustainability and climate change brought most stakeholders to the table, while respondents from the other three regions reported that, “The large part [of stakeholders’ motivation] was that there would be funding to implement the recommendations of the plan.”

Stakeholders also were motivated by a desire to align themselves and their plans with emerging political priorities because “there is a realization that the economic development focus in the state is going to have sustainability in it.” Additional catalysts for stakeholder engagement included: RGGI, the Climate Smart Communities initiative, and some REDCs’ prior work on integrating economic growth and sustainability. The same catalysts also led to generally high public participation in focus groups, surveys, and community involvement sessions.

Interviews revealed relatively few barriers to stakeholder engagement, outlined below.

- › **Geography.** In geographically larger regions, like Western and Southern New York, stakeholders sometimes needed to travel multiple hours to attend in-person meetings. This distance made face-to-face interaction difficult and posed a challenge to regions’ attempts to bring stakeholders together who had not worked in partnership before.

Regional leaders worked to overcome distance issues by using online forums for meetings and sending team leaders to different areas of the region to engage stakeholders who otherwise would not be included.

- › **Territoriality.** In one region, stake-holding non-governmental organizations were “skeptical” about the regional planning process and exhibited “initial internal resistance” because they felt like they would be required to give up “perceived territory.” This led to challenges early in the planning process, but the planning leadership was eventually able to get the organizations “on board” with the collaborative effort.

1.5.2. How well did the planning process, and do the plans themselves, engage and empower targeted actors?

When asked to describe what went well during the planning process, respondents in Central New York, Western New York, and the Southern Tier regions described new region-wide interactions among stakeholders and across topic areas, and they mentioned that were happy with how cross-regional conversations led to discovery of common interests. New York City and Long Island contacts described how their seasoned track record of regional planning efforts made it easy to involve large numbers of people with relevant expertise in the planning process. Many regions also described pride in their Phase I plans and felt that they were in a better position to meet their sustainability goals at the end of the planning process than they had been at the beginning.

Feelings of empowerment varied from region to region, however. When it came to attitudes about putting the plans into action, interviews revealed a notable divide between regions in upstate New York (Southern Tier, Western New York, and Central New York), which are geographically large and have large rural populations, and regions in downstate New York (New York City and Long Island), which are geographically smaller with predominantly urban populations. New York City and Long Island contacts cited a long history of strong political leadership that supports sustainability planning and implementation and exhibited confidence in their ability to fund projects going forward. By contrast, the three upstate regions described varying levels of political and community will to commit resources to the plans and expressed frustration that Phase I plans and Phase II funding were not more closely aligned. Upstate representatives also mentioned that the plans themselves lacked effective advocacy, expressed disappointment that the REDCs did not take more ownership of the plans, and discussed concerns that there were too few professionals in rural areas available to contribute to the implementation of sustainability plans.

1.5.3. To what extent do the regional plan leaders and community members have concern for and commitment to CGC goals?

With the exception of New York City, where a respondent reported a longstanding and high level of concern for sustainability among residents, regions are characterized by varying degrees of concern for sustainability. As one respondent reported, “the region is too large to have one thought.” Examples of divergent levels of concern for sustainability are provided below.

- › **Southern Tier.** One respondent noted a broad level of concern for sustainability, climate change, and associated topics in Ithaca, compared with a narrower breadth of concern in the region’s rural areas, where residents and stakeholders are most interested in how climate change affects agriculture.
- › **Central New York.** The controversy surrounding the construction of a new net zero municipal building highlights a varying degree of concern for sustainability. While many community members supported construction of the building, there was also a notable portion of the community skeptical of investing resources in a project “to achieve a goal where the pay back is deferred.”
- › **Long Island.** There is widespread awareness for sustainability issues in the region. One respondent noted that local governments devote staff to sustainability efforts and local community groups advocate for environmental concerns. According to another respondent, however, awareness does not always manifest in action because residents are more concerned with economic issues, like job availability, due to the effects of the recent recession.
- › **Western New York.** While actions related to water quality and land-use planning are already taking place in Buffalo, concern for sustainability is still “growing” in other, more rural, areas of the region. One respondent noted that more needs to be done to “gain momentum” among rural populations.

Among residents of all five regions, recent and ongoing events, like natural disasters, natural gas exploration, and declining populations, are generating greater concern for and interest in sustainability and climate change. In the Southern Tier, for example, respondents mentioned nearby fracking and the associated environmental and social concerns¹ as something that has increased the visibility of environmental issues. Similarly, flooding attributed to climate change has raised concern for sustainability across the Southern Tier region. On Long Island, Hurricane Sandy and its attribution to climate change “changed the dialogue” among residents, and in New York City, Sandy’s effects emphasized the importance of reducing GHG emissions. In Central New York, the loss of industry and population is a primary concern among residents, but many are starting to see sustainable development and economic development as going hand in hand. In light of concerns about severe weather and climate change, regions’ plans included a number of goals associated with resiliency, including conducting vulnerability assessments, increasing the resiliency of coastal communities, and creating and sustaining microgrids.

1.5.4. To what extent do the regional plan leaders and community members have capacity, or ability, to create and implement plans?

A number of factors affected each region’s ability to create or implement their plans. These factors tended to differ thematically across the upstate and downstate regions.

¹ Concerns included the potential for increases in rent and traffic, the displacement of residents, and contamination of aquifers.

- › **Prior experience level.** All five regions had undertaken some level of sustainability planning before CGC was launched, which enhanced each region’s capacity to complete the Phase I CGC plans. However, downstate regions had a prior history of more comprehensive, region-wide planning, whereas in the upstate regions, pre-CGC sustainability planning tended to occur within individual municipalities. Specifically, in rural areas, local planning tended to occur on an ad hoc basis to address specific issues, such as land use. In urban upstate areas, planning occurred on a broader scale more similar to that of the downstate regions. Consistent with these findings, contacts in the upstate regions described more challenges with bringing together various stakeholders from across the region, particularly from municipalities that had not been involved in sustainability planning before CGC.
- › **Focus groups.** Most regions mentioned that creating stakeholder focus groups was an effective strategy for identifying sustainability goals. The focus groups created an inclusive environment that brought different, often competing, groups together with a united focus on sustainability. Upstate regions mentioned that this was the first time a coordinated sustainability planning effort had occurred on a region-wide level.
- › **Availability of professional skills.** Respondents in upstate regions expressed concern over the lack of professionals in rural areas available to contribute to and implement sustainability planning, particularly professionals with the skills and interest to do so. In the more urban, downstate regions, respondents reported that they have the professional workforce necessary to achieve their goals.
- › **Planning funds and timeline.** Respondents in all regions indicated that the initial funding and short timeframe to create the CGC plans was an effective call to action; stakeholders wanted to take advantage of funding opportunities, and the short timeframe motivated them to act quickly. However, the limited amount of funds and time for planning, combined with uncertainty regarding how much funding and time would be available for implementation of projects created some challenges in moving the plans forward in a timely manner, particularly in upstate regions that had not engaged in sustainability planning at a region-wide level in the past.
- › **Technical consultants.** Respondents from NYSERDA and TRC reported that the capacity of each region to complete the CGC plan depended heavily on the consulting firm hired in each region. Regions that hired a consulting firm with expertise in sustainability planning tended to create more detailed plans in the requested format than regions that hired consulting firms with expertise in the scientific or technical aspects of sustainability.

1.5.5. To what extent do leaders and community members face conditions that permit them to engage in CGC goals?

Social, political, and economic conditions presented both opportunities and challenges that influenced each region’s ability to create and implement CGC plans. As with findings regarding

capacity, the conditions that affected planning and implementation differed for upstate and downstate regions.

- › **Urban-rural divide.** Respondents in the three upstate regions highlighted implications of an urban-rural divide. Many rural stakeholders wanted CGC plans to encompass goals that would grow industry and enhance local governments' and businesses' ability to address economic development issues. These issues were often seen as equally important to, or more important than, sustainability issues. Stakeholders from urban areas, on the other hand, seemed more concerned about their region's ability to create projects directly related to sustainability issues, like setting and meeting GHG reduction targets and promoting energy efficiency, with less emphasis on economic development.

Although urban and rural communities tended to hold disparate views on the relative importance of sustainability versus economic development, the Phase I planning process seemed effective at providing opportunities for these groups to have their concerns heard and integrated into the plan. Further, the scope of the CGC program helped reframe sustainability and economic development as complementary, rather than competing, efforts. Several respondents from upstate regions reported that projects in both rural and urban areas have received, or are in the process of receiving funding. Further, some of these projects involve coordination between stakeholders in urban and rural areas, including an energy reduction program in public schools and a biomass heating program.

- › **Politics.** Respondents in the downstate regions emphasized challenges and opportunities relating primarily to politics. Like their urban counterparts in the upstate regions, downstate stakeholders described focusing on creating sustainability projects and goals, with less emphasis on economic development. Although downstate respondents did not mention nearly as many challenges as upstate respondents with bringing stakeholders together, downstate respondents did mention that the political attitudes and beliefs of stakeholders often created conflict around the prioritizing of sustainability goals and the methods needed to achieve these goals.

While desire to be involved in a state-led initiative ordered by the governor had the benefit of bringing some stakeholders to the table, state-level politics weighed on the decisions made by regional teams regarding what projects and goals to include in the plans and how to prioritize them. Most of the planning teams were mindful of whether goals and plans would be in conflict with state-level politics and other initiatives, like creating jobs or not limiting transportation options. Teams were reluctant to include goals or plans that might not be in line with state initiatives due to the politics involved.

- › **Jurisdictional overlap and questions of authority.** A challenge reported by respondents in all regions is the overlap of jurisdictions and the number of groups or organizations competing for resources. These issues were most paramount in discussions of land use, transportation, water, and waste management, and other initiatives that cross multiple jurisdictions. Respondents discussed instances where different jurisdictions, and groups within them, had the opportunity to work together to reach common goals, but had

difficulty determining which jurisdiction had the proper authority to propose and conduct a project, and which group or agency would take the lead and/or benefit from the project.

1.5.6. How did NYSERDA support regions' plan-development efforts?

At the outset of Phase I, NYSERDA provided regions with a standard statement of work and a framework for the sustainability plans. Program staff also provided guidance on the GHG inventory regions were required to conduct and, with input from the regions, developed a standard process for measuring progress toward goals outlined in the sustainability plans. Over the course of Phase I, NYSERDA and TRC provided additional guidance on best practices for the planning documents, including the level of detail expected. Although regional representatives reported having contact with NYSERDA or TRC staff throughout the planning process, interactions were more frequent at the beginning (ramp up) and end (plan finalization) stages.

The NYSERDA team had a short window of time to develop the CGC program (about six weeks) so that the program could be included in the state's first Consolidated Funding Application (CFA). Program staff² noted that this "compressed timeline" made it challenging "to understand the nuts and bolts of how [the program] was going to play out in reality." The ramifications of the accelerated timeline trickled down to regional planners. One region contact reported, for example, that they engaged in "a lot of duplication of effort" to address guidance that was provided by NYSERDA after they had already completed work on aspects of their plan.

Phase I lasted one year in its entirety, including NYSERDA's selection of organizations to lead regions' planning efforts through a competitive application process. That left regions with about eight to nine months to develop their goals and indicators of success and create planning documents. Some respondents felt that the timeline was unrealistic for the amount of work required, and one respondent would have liked more time to foster stakeholder engagement.

Another ramification of the program's short timeline was that Phase II of CGC was not fully developed when Phase I occurred. As one member of the program staff noted, "We weren't able to describe how Phase II would really work... We explained what we thought it would look like, but we couldn't give any specifics." As a result, region contacts felt that they were investing significant time and resources into Phase I without knowing whether they were in a good position to receive funding from Phase II.

The lack of specificity regarding Phase II also created confusion for contacts in some regions, who expected to receive guidance and support from NYSERDA during Phase II, but instead felt like NYSERDA was "hands off" once the plans were complete. As one member of the program staff explained, "We did our best to explain [Phase II funding was available] not just for projects specifically named [in the plans] but for any project that supported the region's goals. Some regions didn't quite understand – they thought that if the project was in the plan then it would get Phase II funding priority. But that wasn't the case."

² This analysis includes the respondent from TRC in the category of "program staff."

1.5.7. What types of post-planning support might be most effective in driving plan accomplishments?

The findings of Wave 1 research reveal a number of opportunities for NYSERDA to help regions implement their Phase I plans and accomplish their sustainability goals.

- › **Provide opportunities for “ownership” of the plans.** CGC was effective in mobilizing stakeholders, creating intra-regional relationships, and encouraging the development of plans responsive to the unique challenges and opportunities faced by the state’s ten regions. Contacts expressed pride in and enthusiasm for their plans, and regions are poised to capitalize on the knowledge, infrastructure, and momentum cultivated during the planning process. NYSERDA can, and should, seize this opportunity to support the ongoing transformation of New York’s local and regional communities.

One challenge facing the realization of the plans is that there is no clear “owner” of the planning documents or a concrete strategy for how the plans will be managed over time. According to a program staff contact, “There needs to be a permanent infrastructure in place to track progress and update it over time and maintain connections to municipalities.” There are multiple ways NYSERDA might continue to capitalize on the achievements of Phase I, including: 1) Pursue opportunities to support implementation of the plans through the delivery or expansion of new NYSERDA initiatives; 2) Provide REDCs with additional funding and support to implement and track the plans; and 3) Develop a state-level program to oversee progress toward regional sustainability goals. These efforts will help NYSERDA and the REDCs meet their shared goals of achieving a more sustainable future, promoting economic development, and fostering regional collaboration.

- › **Highlight additional opportunities for funding.** NYSERDA designed the CGC program with the expectation that the Phase I plans would create opportunities for far more projects than could be supported through Phase II funding. Some region contacts expressed desire for additional guidance from NYSERDA on attaining funding for their projects. This sentiment is particularly strong in regions that did not engage in region-level planning before CGC and that lack the professional workforce to engage in large-scale, long-term sustainable development. NYSERDA could provide guidance to regions through online resources or biannual meetings with interested REDC members or municipal staff. Potential sources of funding include the New York State Economic Development Fund, DOE, EPA, and state and federal Departments of Agriculture and Transportation.
- › **Continue leveraging both economic and sustainability concerns.** One strength of the CGC program is that it leveraged both stakeholders’ environmental and financial motives. The program also helped stakeholders see sustainability and economic development as complementary, rather than competing, efforts. When possible, NYSERDA should continue to promote the reciprocal relationship between economic and sustainable development and between achieving environmental and financial goals.

Specifically, initiatives that increase sustainability and resiliency in ways that foster economic growth, like creating green jobs, revitalizing downtown cores, and improving infrastructure in the manufacturing and agricultural sectors, may be particularly likely to elicit high stakeholder engagement.

- › **Help regions turn challenging conditions into opportunities.** Many of the conditions that created barriers or challenges for regions also provided opportunities, like regional diversity or coordination between jurisdictions. Additional opportunities for intra-regional coordination will help stakeholders turn these challenging circumstances into strengths that enable their regions to attain high-level goals and implement projects that cross jurisdictional borders and political divides.

1.6. Subsequent Research Waves

The work plan for this evaluation currently includes two additional waves of data collection:

- › Wave 2: Interview surveys of partnering and informed non-partnering municipalities; a web survey of planning team staff; and
- › Wave 3: In-depth interviews with a subset of planning team staff; interview surveys of uninvolved municipalities.

Upon receipt of this memo, NYSERDA staff and the research team will discuss the preliminary findings as well as whether the subsequent waves of data collection should occur as planned or whether the research team should change the work plan to address unanswered questions. Issues open for discussion include, but are not limited to: groups to interview or survey in Waves 2 and 3, regions to include in subsequent analyses, and changes to the evaluation schedule. For example, conducting interview surveys with REDC contacts may provide insight into other steps NYSERDA could take to capitalize on the momentum created during Phase I.