



Board of Directors Regular Meeting

Meeting Date: 9/20/2018

Agenda Item No.: 2018-September-9.

SACOG Board of Directors

Subject: Rural-Urban Connections Strategy 2.0 (Est. time: 60 minutes)

Workshop

Prepared by: David Shabazian

Approved by: James Corless

Attachments: Yes

1. Issue:

The Rural-Urban Connections Strategy (RUCS) program has completed an outreach process to develop a "RUCS 2.0" strategy and work plan to guide future work.

2. Recommendation:

None, this item is for information only; however, board input on the draft strategy and work plan content for RUCS 2.0 is requested in preparation for board approval in October.

3. Background/Analysis:

SACOG initiated the RUCS program in 2008 to better incorporate rural challenges and opportunities--as well the connection between the rural and urban parts of the six-county region--into regional planning. The program to date has developed a toolkit of data, modeling, and scenario evaluation that offers a means by which public and private stakeholders can evaluate policy and investment options that support and enhance rural economic development and environmental sustainability. In March 2018, staff proposed exploring the next phase of RUCS, or RUCS 2.0, with the intent of focusing on how to apply existing RUCS tools and implement strategies. With committee direction, staff moved forward with a RUCS 2.0 outreach process designed to help SACOG determine the next phase of this program. The RUCS 2.0 outreach process began formally in April and has been facilitated by Daniel Kaufman from Third Plateau.

The outreach process began with a workshop luncheon in April, to gather board input on topics, initiatives, and services that SACOG should focus on in the RUCS program going forward. This workshop was the primary point of engagement with board members as stakeholders. Additional key engagement components for the process included stakeholder outreach interviews and surveys with local farmers, natural resource managers, processors, retailers, and local economic development staff. This was followed by the formation of an advisory committee, and a retreat for project staff and the advisory committee.

The engagement process yielded ideas for RUCS implementation and a recommendation of where SACOG should direct RUCS efforts going forward. This has been summarized in a draft strategy or “Theory of Change” and draft concept work plan based upon the Theory of Change.

4. Discussion/Analysis:

The draft RUCS 2.0 Theory of Change, is a document intended to explain how the region’s rural economic and environmental assets could evolve and how the RUCS program, leveraging SACOG’s core competencies, could help realize a vision of a vibrant, resilient, sustainable rural economy and ecosystem. As shown in Attachment A, a theory of change is a visual map that captures the necessary preconditions that connect an organization’s inputs and activities to its long-term outcomes and impact. At the board meeting, Daniel Kaufman will provide an overview of the draft Theory of Change and its nexus to a draft work plan, included as Attachment B, that SACOG can utilize in the coming year.

The workshop will provide an opportunity for the board to engage staff and consultants on the development and application of RUCS 2.0. Input provided by the board will be incorporated into a final RUCS 2.0 Theory of Change and workplan, including staffing needs and budget. This will return to the committee and board in October for final action.

5. Fiscal Impact/Grant Information:

The RUCS 2.0 strategy and work plan development is included as part of the current Overall Work Plan and budget. Implementation costs for the RUCS 2.0 work plan are planned to be partially covered through SB1 planning funds and additional resources that will need to be generated through sources such as state and federal grants, etc.

6. This staff report aligns with the following SACOG Work Plan Goals:

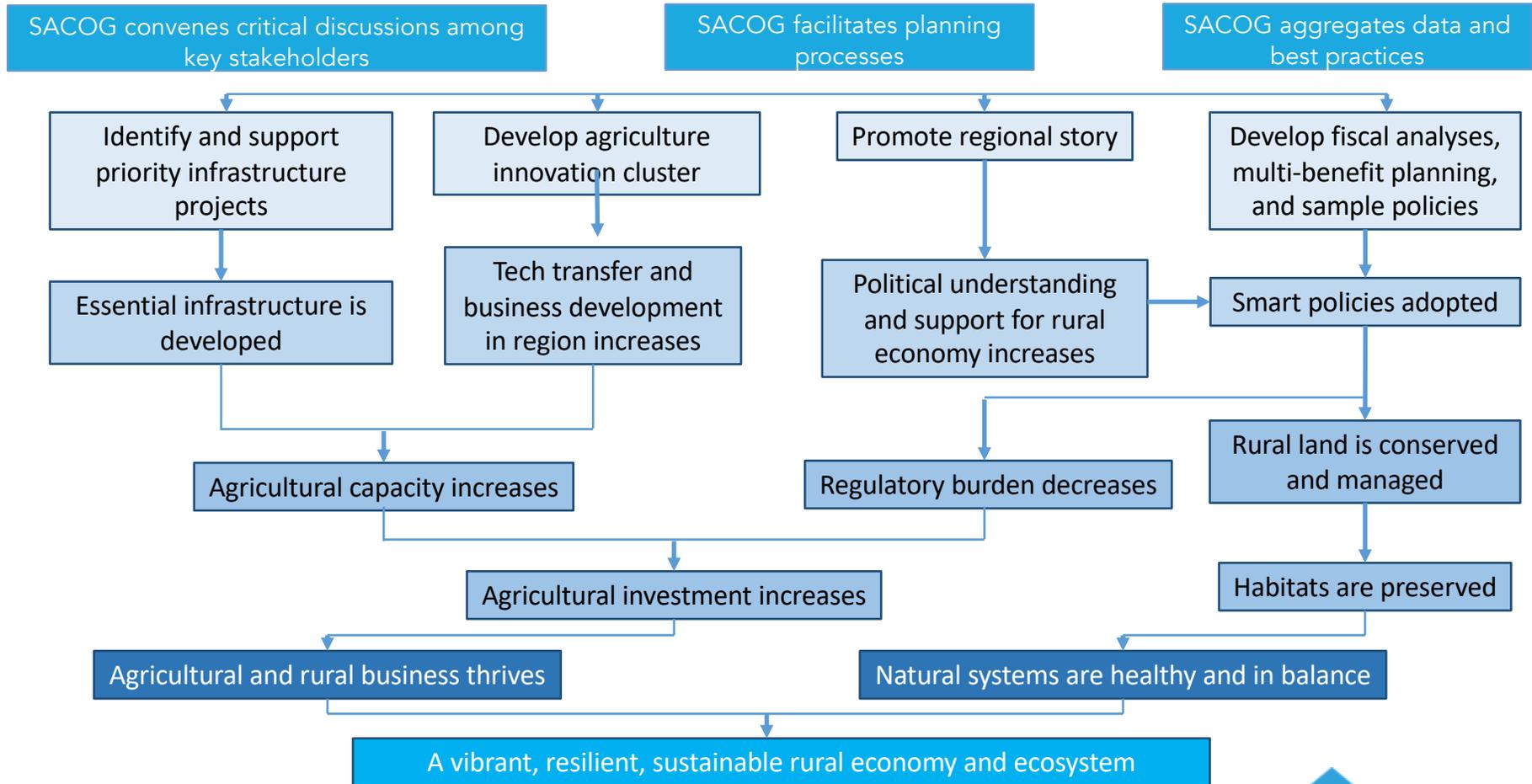
1. Advance Economic Prosperity

ATTACHMENTS:

Description

Attachment A - Theory of Change

Attachment B - RUCS Workplan Narrative



RUCS 2.0 2018-19 Workplan

Through extensive stakeholder engagement, including 28 one-on-one interviews, a lunch meeting with the SACOG board, and a half-day retreat with the RUCS Kitchen Cabinet, the RUCS program (“RUCS”), with the support of Third Plateau, developed its theory of change for accomplishing its long-term vision of a vibrant, resilient, sustainable rural economy and ecosystem. Building on SACOG’s core competencies of convening critical discussions, facilitating planning processes, and aggregating data and best practices, RUCS articulated a series of steps that it must take to effectively impact the region’s infrastructure, economy, and natural resources to ultimately deliver on its vision.

In reviewing these activities, the RUCS team identified four actions that are necessary preconditions to everything else within the theory of change:

1. Identify the parameters of an agriculture innovation cluster;
2. Identify priority infrastructure projects;
3. Articulate and promote the regional story; and
4. Facilitate educational tours for legislators and their staff.

RUCS will focus on accomplishing these four priorities during 2018-19.

Priority #1: Identify the parameters of an agriculture innovation cluster

As identified in the Brookings Institution report, the Sacramento region has a significant opportunity to build a high functioning economic cluster at the intersection of agriculture, food, and science and technology.¹ To do this, the region must align its interest and create a shared agenda. SACOG, through RUCS, is playing a role in facilitating and developing the Ag & Food component of the Prosperity Plan. To ensure its work is aligned with the broader effort, RUCS will adopt the workplan emerging from the Ag & Food group. To the greatest extent possible, the other elements of the RUCS 2018-19 workplan will flow from the work emerging from this effort.

Essential to the success of this endeavor will be SACOG building and deepening relationships with key stakeholders in the region. The Brookings economic prosperity report for the SACOG region identified UC Davis as a critical stakeholder in regional economic planning, particularly in generating and implementing innovation in the agriculture and food economic cluster. SACOG, along with other partners, will work to engage UC Davis in developing the Prosperity Plan and its underlying strategies, including increasing ag tech transfer and new business development.

By June, 2019, the region will be aligned around a plan to develop an agriculture innovation cluster.

Priority #2: Identify priority infrastructure projects

The foundation of a vibrant rural economy is infrastructure. Across the region, rural interests have pointed to the need for significant investment to improve existing and develop new road, water, land management, housing, and high-speed connectivity projects that will facilitate sustainable economic development. While SACOG manages the funding round every other year, to date, it has not applied a RUCS-centric lens to its analysis of identifying priority projects. Moving forward, SACOG will look to fund those projects that will have the greatest growth impact for the rural economy. To do this, RUCS will:

¹ https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/sacramento-region-economic-prosperity_fullreport.pdf

- Facilitate interviews and focus groups with rural stakeholders to identify high value infrastructure projects in specific jurisdictions;
- Survey local governments to identify their infrastructure priorities;
- Analyze the benefits of infrastructure projects identified through the interviews, focus groups, and surveys and develop a regional prioritization to inform funding allocations; and
- Recommend a portfolio of specific projects for funding to the SACOG board.

By June, 2019, the region will allocate funding for infrastructure investments intended to fuel sustainable rural economic development.

Priority #3: Articulate and promote the regional story

If the region is to develop a coherent sustainable economic development plan for its rural lands, it is essential that the region deepen its understanding and narrative of the interplay between food, the environment, and the region's economy. As one of, if not the only, regional actor focused on these concerns, and the lead of the Ag & Food component of the Prosperity Plan, SACOG is positioned to lead the effort to build on the Farm-to-Fork narrative and articulate and promote the story of the region's rural-urban connection. To do this, RUCS will:

- Build on the group organized through the Prosperity Plan to develop and facilitate a steering committee of member jurisdictions and organizational partners that can help organize and convene stakeholders;
- Host stakeholder workshops (a la Blueprint) to source and engage diverse perspectives;
- Adopt and utilize a technology platform to facilitate and inform a broader community conversation;
- Aggregate the feedback gleaned from the workshops and technology platform to craft a regional story that integrates, aligns, and links regional interests; and
- Engage a campaign expert to design and launch a campaign strategy to promote the regional story.

By December, 2019, a regional network of member jurisdictions and organizational partners will endorse and champion the regional story.

Priority #4: Facilitate educational tours for legislators and their staff

One of the core rural economic development challenges in the region is the complicated and burdensome regulatory environment. Regulations are often adopted without a nuanced understanding of their practical impacts on agricultural interests. In an effort to ameliorate this situation, SACOG will develop a series of educational field tours with the goal of introducing state and local legislators and their staff to the realities on the ground for farmers and others working in the rural economy. These tours will productively inform regulatory discussions and bring legislators and staff together to think critically about how policy can be leveraged to strengthen the rural economy and protect the region's natural resources. To do this, RUCS will:

- Identify relatively straight-forward, non-controversial local policy, regulatory, and funding priorities that are also germane to the Ag & Food Prosperity Plan;
- Identify and meet with the local and regional actors relevant to the selected policy, regulatory, and funding priorities;

- Plan, coordinate, and facilitate two tours geared toward local elected officials and their staff;
- Produce and disseminate written and video summaries of the tours to promote the impact of the tours;
- Remain in contact with tour participants to identify state and federal impediments to adopting policy change; and
- Develop case studies featuring local farmers, processors, and officials that highlight their challenges with easing the regulatory burden.

By December, 2019, RUCS will have completed at least one legislative tour focusing attention on two opportunities for policy change to ease the regulatory burden on the rural economy. If necessary, SACOG will provide technical assistance to elected officials and their staff to develop and implement policy responses. RUCS will look to use the policy change response as a case study for a 2019-2020 legislative tour focused on highlighting state regulatory challenges.