COUNCIL OF STATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (COSCDA)

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN REPORT

WASHINGTON, DC   **APRIL 2024**

COSCDA

Council of State Community
Development Agencies

COUNCIL OF STATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (COSCDA)

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN REPORT

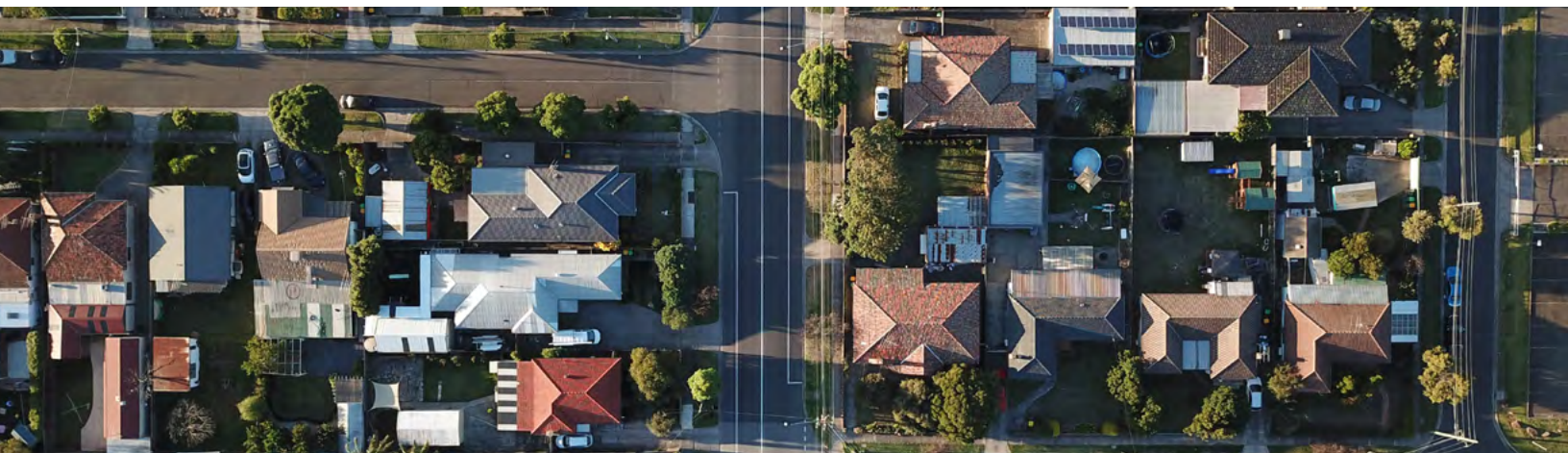**WASHINGTON, DC**   **APRIL 2024**

This report presents the outcomes of the COSCDA Strategic Action Plan project. The report has been produced as part of the COSCDA visioning and strategic planning project which aims to develop a new strategic action plan that will guide decision-making over the next three years.

This report and the associated data analysis are available at:

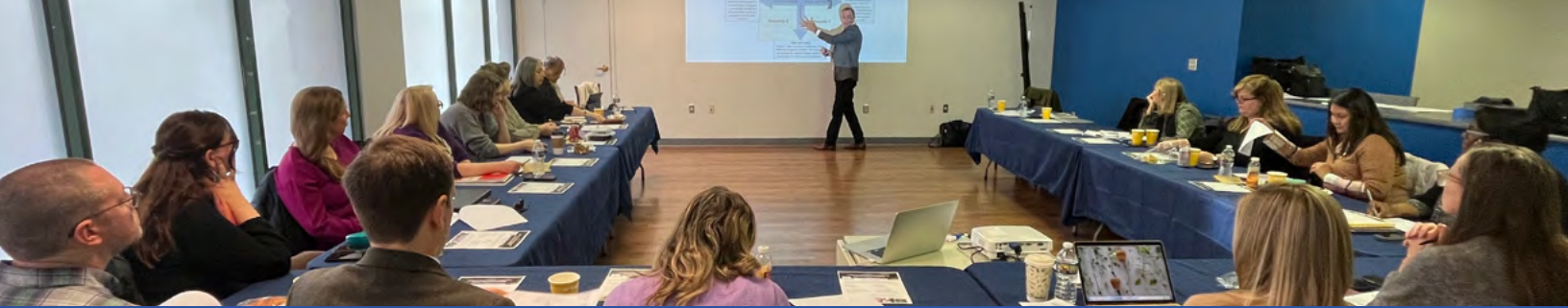**lab2.future-iq.com/coscda-strategic-action-plan-project/**

REPORT PREPARED BY:

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1.0 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COSCDA Board Members, Staff, and Members have engaged in this strategic planning process with great enthusiasm. Their passion and interest have ensured that discussions were open, thoughtful, and reflective of the myriad of perspectives that exist within the organization. Thank you also to Dianne Taylor, former COSCDA Executive Director, for participating in the Think-Tank. Her wisdom and guidance was greatly appreciated. This dedication is reflective of the deep commitment participants have to the future of COSCDA.

Additionally, our appreciation is extended to Tess Hembree, who met on a weekly basis and provided the organizational expertise that helped guide this project. Her time and dedication are greatly appreciated.

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This report lays out the agreed upon future vision and strategic positioning for COSCDA over the next three years. It identifies the key strategic actions and priorities needed to achieve the preferred future for the organization.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS AND OUTCOMES OF THE COSCDA STRATEGIC PLANNING PROCESS

WILLINGNESS TO TACKLE THE GRAND CHALLENGES OF THE DAY

COSCDA Board members and stakeholders expressed a keen desire to try new approaches to tackle the grand challenges of today. For example, stakeholders acknowledged the growing demand for people trained in disaster recovery due to the grand challenges brought on by climate change. COSCDA can take a leadership role in providing critical disaster recovery training needed to assist agencies and organizations across the country.

AMPLIFY COSCDA'S VOICE AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

Throughout the strategic planning process, Board members and stakeholders emphasized the need to amplify COSCDA's voice to increase recognition and appreciation for what COSCDA does. This amplification would help to attract new partnerships and potential members, and demonstrate value to its members. Stakeholders also want the organization to be a thought leader in CDBG and related areas. As a go-to organization, this would help to strengthen the voices of its membership.

FOCUS ON ADVOCACY AND NATIONAL POSITIONING

The essence of COSCDA is its advocacy for the interests of its membership, and stakeholders recognize that this is also a building block of the organization's national positioning. Working to deepen the ties with Congress and federal agencies is an ongoing process for COSCDA and should be pursued. COSCDA has the opportunity to shine a brighter light on its leadership position potential through the use of national media and communications.

BUILD ORGANIZATIONAL CAPACITY

In order to build organizational capacity that increases targeted services for its members, it was recognized that COSCDA will need to increase staff capacity to support this change. Stakeholders recognized that this would require a predictable revenue stream dependent on consistent and reliable funding sources. Innovative funding sources could be explored, including access to resources by non-member on a fee-basis, and vendor sponsorships that align with COSCDA's mission and vision.

3.0 | OVERVIEW OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

In creating COSCDA's Strategic Action Plan, stakeholders worked together to explore the organization's national ecosystem and how it could evolve in the future. The 6-month planning process began in October 2023 and ended in April 2024. This report outlines how the extensive accumulated data has informed the identification of a unified preferred future and key strategic action areas for implementing COSCDA's Strategic Action Plan.

For a complete account of COSCDA's strategic planning process and reports, please see the project portal at lab2.future-iq.com/coscda-strategic-action-plan-project/ .

Council of State Community Development Agencies (COSCDA)
Strategic Planning Process

STEP 1
Explore Perceptions

Project kick-off meeting

Online project portal

Key Stakeholder interviews

Project Portal

OCT - NOV 2023

STEP 2
Future Scenarios & Implications

Stakeholder Survey #1

COSCDA Think-Tank

Identify Preferred Future

Scenarios of the Future Think-Tank Report

NOV 2023 - JAN 2024

STEP 3
Develop Draft Strategic Plan

Focus Groups

Stakeholder Survey #2

Develop Final Plan

Draft Final Plan Report

FEB - MAR 2024

Final Presentation

Strategic Plan

APR 2024

"At the end of the day, we must remember that COSCDA is an organization created by states and for states. Let this be our guiding principle as we craft this new strategic plan."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Focus Group Participant

3.1 | HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

As community development agencies and organizations across the United States emerge from the COVID-19 pandemic and look to the future, anticipating new realities and being 'future ready' is essential for building resiliency.
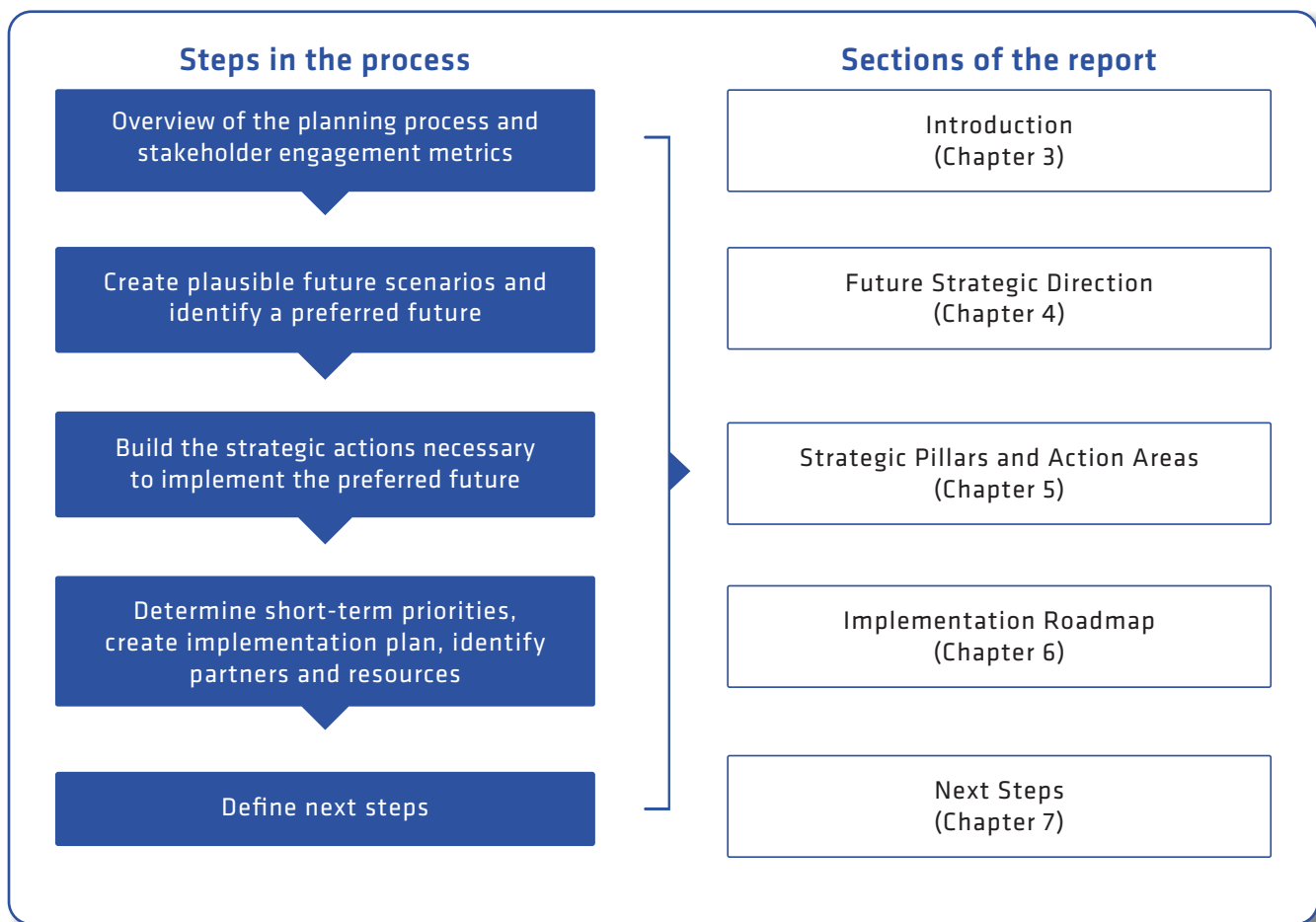
This report lays out the findings from each key step in the planning process. The process moved from background analysis and exploration, to identifying key priorities for the future of COSCDA. More details about the overall planning process may be viewed on COSCDA's project portal at: **lab2.future-iq.com/coscda-strategic-action-plan-project/**.

This work represents robust 'future gazing' where stakeholders considered possible directions and the impacts and consequences of those directions. The process, and the report, then drill down deeper into what people saw as the optimal or preferred future for COSCDA. This understanding helps lay the groundwork for figuring out what next steps to take. The preferred future identified through this process presents an exciting and compelling vision for how COSCDA could evolve as an organization looking out to 2035.

Steps in the process	Sections of the report
Overview of the planning process and stakeholder engagement metrics	Introduction (Chapter 3)
Create plausible future scenarios and identify a preferred future	Future Strategic Direction (Chapter 4)
Build the strategic actions necessary to implement the preferred future	Strategic Pillars and Action Areas (Chapter 5)
Determine short-term priorities, create implementation plan, identify partners and resources	Implementation Roadmap (Chapter 6)
Define next steps	Next Steps (Chapter 7)

3.2 | BUILDING ON A STRONG FOUNDATION

COSCDA originated in 1974 as the Council of State Community Affairs Agencies (COSCAA), a nonprofit organization created by Directors of State Departments of Community Affairs to establish a forum for discussion of and action on national issues of common interest. The organization evolved over time to also include economic development responsibilities and in 1989, the COSCDA membership voted to change the name to the Council of State Community Development Agencies (COSCDA).

COSCDA represents the leadership role of the states as the premier voice of authority to Congress, federal and state agencies in advocating and promoting community development and affordable housing, eliminating homelessness and in providing technical assistance and increasing collaboration among state partners.

The mission of COSCDA is to:

- **Advocate for the common community development goals of the states;**

- **Develop policies and recommendations on community development issues;**

- **Keep members informed on federal and state legislative and administrative developments that affect them;**

- **Enhance the capacity of states to deal effectively and comprehensively with community development issues;**

- **Ensure the availability of community development expertise to members;**

- **Encourage and assist states in the development and implementation of effective community development programs; and**

- **Facilitate the exchange of information about programs and achievements among states**

This strategic planning process was built on COSCDA's strong foundation and historical evolution. Board Members, Staff, and Members are acutely aware of and grateful for the countless volunteer and Staff hours that have created the organization it is today. This Strategic Action Plan has emerged with a vision for the future of COSCDA that will guide decision-making in the short-term over the next three years, and in the long-term looking out to 2035.
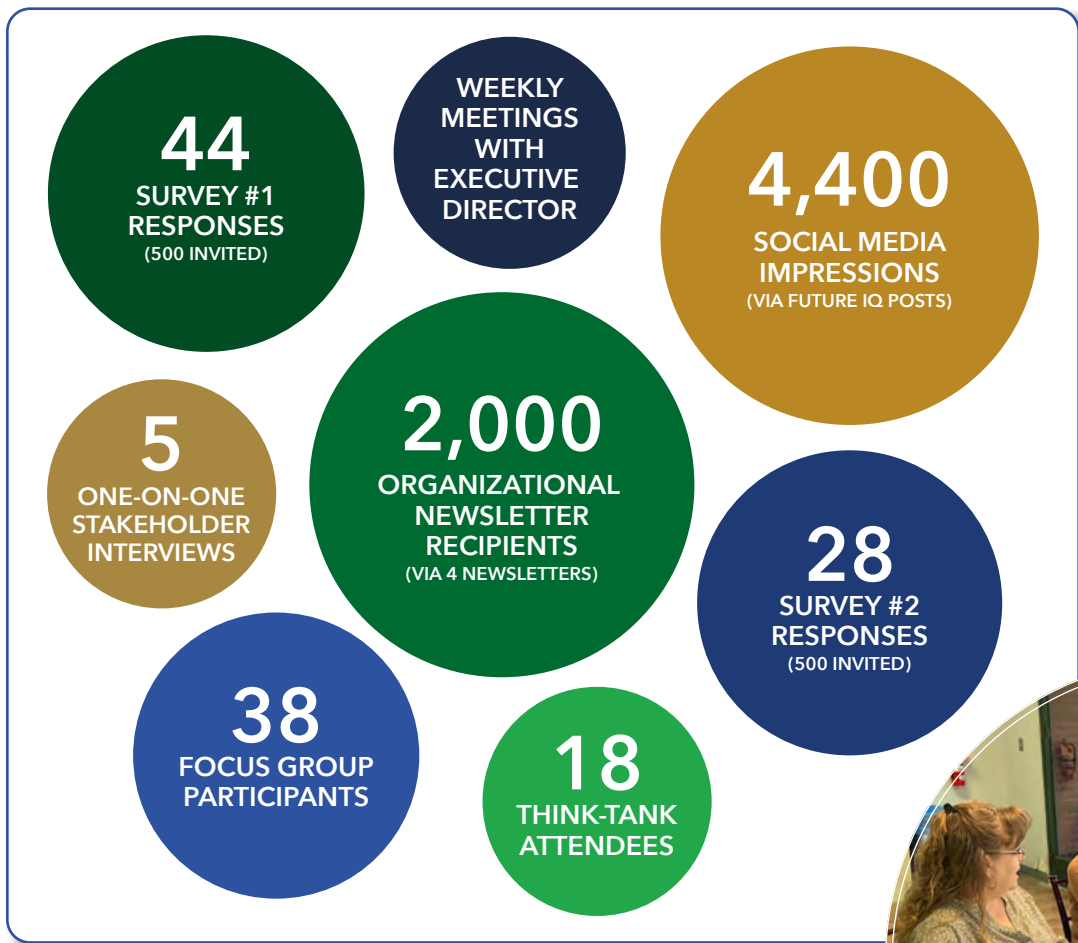
3.3 | STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT METRICS

The COSCDA strategic planning process is built on extensive stakeholder input. This engagement was a central design feature of the planning process. The engagement and data-driven methodology progressively focused the discussion on emerging key themes and stakeholder aspirations for the future. The purpose of the process was to arrive at a 'point of consensus' that represented the shared vision for the future of COSCDA. The result is a Strategic Action Plan with actions that propel the organization towards that preferred future.

A key feature of the engagement and planning process was the mixture of virtual and in-person sessions as well as online surveys and newsletters to reach the broadest range of stakeholders as possible.

The COSCDA strategic planning process involved many stakeholder hours over the course of 6 months. Survey results, reports, and project activities were all published on the project portal to provide an open and transparent process for all stakeholders.

44
SURVEY #1 RESPONSES
(500 INVITED)

WEEKLY MEETINGS WITH EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

4,400
SOCIAL MEDIA IMPRESSIONS
(VIA FUTURE IQ POSTS)

5
ONE-ON-ONE STAKEHOLDER INTERVIEWS

2,000
ORGANIZATIONAL NEWSLETTER RECIPIENTS
(VIA 4 NEWSLETTERS)

28
SURVEY #2 RESPONSES
(500 INVITED)

38
FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANTS

18
THINK-TANK ATTENDEES

Following the Focus Groups, a survey was distributed to the COSCDA Board and membership to validate the Strategic Pillars and potential Action Areas that emerged from the Focus Groups. Twenty-eight out of 500 people responded to the survey. The survey results may be viewed in detail on the project portal at: **lab2.future-iq.com/coscda-strategic-action-plan-project/**.

While the sample size of the survey was relatively small, the respondents were well informed stakeholders who had a solid understanding of the organization and its challenges.

MEMBERSHIP BASE AND POTENTIAL

Survey respondents were asked to rate eight action areas in terms of their importance to strengthening COSCDA's membership base and potential. The most important action that can be taken to strengthen COSCDA's membership base and potential was identified as continuing to develop online resources for members, followed equally by expanding connection areas with member organizations, and growing membership under disaster recovery.

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Survey respondents were asked to rate eight action areas in terms of their importance to building COSCDA's partnerships with other agencies. The most important action to be taken to build COSCDA's partnerships with other agencies was identified by survey respondents as becoming a roundtable convener in strength areas of CDBG, Housing, Homelessness, and Disaster Recovery. This was followed equally by being directional and intentional in outreach efforts, and strengthening practical partnerships with agencies such as USDA and EPA.

ADVOCACY AND PROGRAMS

Survey respondents were asked to rate eight action areas in terms of their importance to COSCDA's advocacy and programs. Where all of these actions were considered important, survey respondents identified the most important actions to be taken to support COSCDA's advocacy and programs as improving communications with member states and Congress, exploring advocacy opportunities caused by the gaps emerging in post-covid spending era, and educating policy makers about the negative impacts of earmarks.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFF CAPACITY

Survey respondents were asked to rate eight action areas in terms of their importance to COSCDA's organizational and staff capacity. The most important actions to be taken to support COSCDA's organizational and staff capacity were identified as invest in curriculum development, followed by increase training levels for CDBG to basic, mid-level, and advanced, and equally to increase zoom trainings for members to increase access and value and expand training options at conferences and events.

NATIONAL POSITIONING

Survey respondents were asked to rate eight action areas in terms of their importance to COSCDA's national positioning. Where all of these actions were considered important to national positioning by survey respondents, the most important action was identified as continuing to update the COSCDA website to serve member needs, followed by strengthening current relationships on a Federal level, and equally developing a Communications Plan for COSCDA and finding a way to reengage with groups that have become less involved in the organization over time.

> The scenario planning process encourages curiosity and collaboration by providing a way to explore plausible future scenarios from a speculative standpoint.

4.1 | IDENTIFYING THE PREFERRED FUTURE – VISION FOR COSCDA

To identify the preferred future or vision for COSCDA, stakeholders participated in a scenario-planning workshop called a Think-Tank. This two-day scenario-based Think-Tank was conducted in-person on December 7 & 8, 2023. Eighteen Board Members and Staff attended the Think-Tank. The Think-Tank was intended to build coherency around a vision for the future of COSCDA that will guide stakeholders looking out to 2035.

The scenario planning process provides a method to explore plausible futures and consider the implications of various future scenarios. The Think-Tank workshop aimed to:

- **Deepen the understanding and examination of how external events and local conditions could shape decision-making**

- **Identify and understand the key influences, trends, and dynamics that will shape the organization looking out to 2035**

- **Create and describe four plausible long-term scenarios for COSCDA**

- **Explore alignment around a shared future vision**

- **Explore potential high-level strategies that could propel COSCDA to its preferred future**

The scenarios developed during the planning process are important to provide a framework to discuss future possible outcomes and implications for COSCDA planning for the next three years. In addition, the Think-Tank deliberations assisted in identifying key actions for the organization and in exploring how various agencies and organizations might collaborate to best contribute to future policymaking. The process involved exploration of local trends and forces of change and development of a scenario matrix defining four plausible scenario spaces for the future. The event concluded with discussion of the scenarios, selection of a preferred scenario, and the identification of potential high-level strategic themes and actions that could propel COSCDA to its preferred future. For additional information and details on COSCDA's visioning process, please read the **COSCDA Think-Tank Report**.

The scenario development process at the Think-Tank provided stakeholders the opportunity to examine the implications and consequences of different and plausible future directions for COSCDA.

During the COSCDA Think-Tank, participants worked through a scenario planning methodology to create four different scenarios of the future. The scenarios were created using the participant generated data that informed a scenario matrix framework that was built around the two macro themes of '**Organizational Focus and Role**' and '**Membership and Network**'.

Broad and active

Build a larger more influential network. Embrace and initiate partnerships and collaborations, that connect to new leaders, ideas and potential membership.

Stay the course

Remain on course with core mission and role. Offer traditional training programs and support to member States. Respond to changing funding and programmatic needs in a pragmatic and reactive manner.
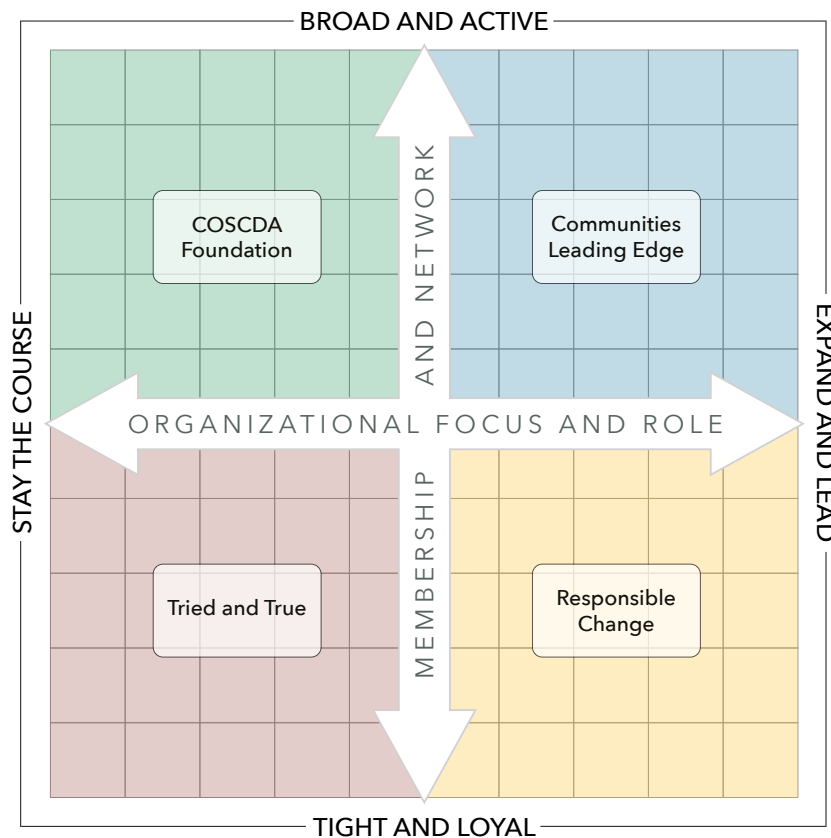
Expand and lead

Expand the mission to provide more advocacy, thought-leadership and innovative 'real time' training opportunities. Build value proposition as a 'go-to' organization on key issues and expand funding model.

BROAD AND ACTIVE

STAY THE COURSE

AND NETWORK

EXPAND AND LEAD

COSCDA Foundation

Communities Leading Edge

ORGANIZATIONAL FOCUS AND ROLE

MEMBERSHIP

Tried and True

Responsible Change

TIGHT AND LOYAL

Tight and loyal

Retain a tight and loyal membership, that funds and supports COSCDA. The priority is on serving the member States needs and providing them with value and attention.

4.3 | EXPECTED AND PREFERRED FUTURES

The preferred future 'Communities Leading Edge' outlines a shared vision for the future of COSCDA. The trajectory from the expected to the preferred future constitutes the strategies and actions needed to make this vision become a reality.

Think-Tank participants took a Heatmap Survey that included three questions about the trajectory of COSCDA's future development. The first question was about the least desired future for COSCDA. The second question was about the expected future – the future deemed most likely to happen if there is no change in the current trajectory of COSCDA's development. Most participants believed that Scenario C 'Responsible Change' was the scenario that represented the expected future for COSCDA. The third question was about the preferred future – the future most desired by participants. Think-Tank participants expressed a clear preference for Scenario B, 'Communities Leading Edge.'
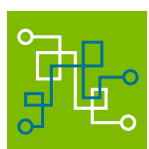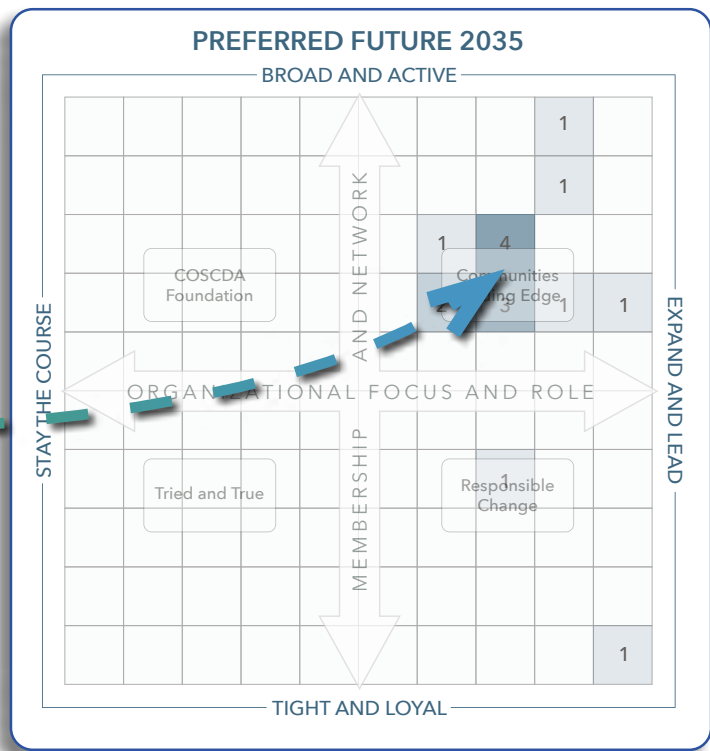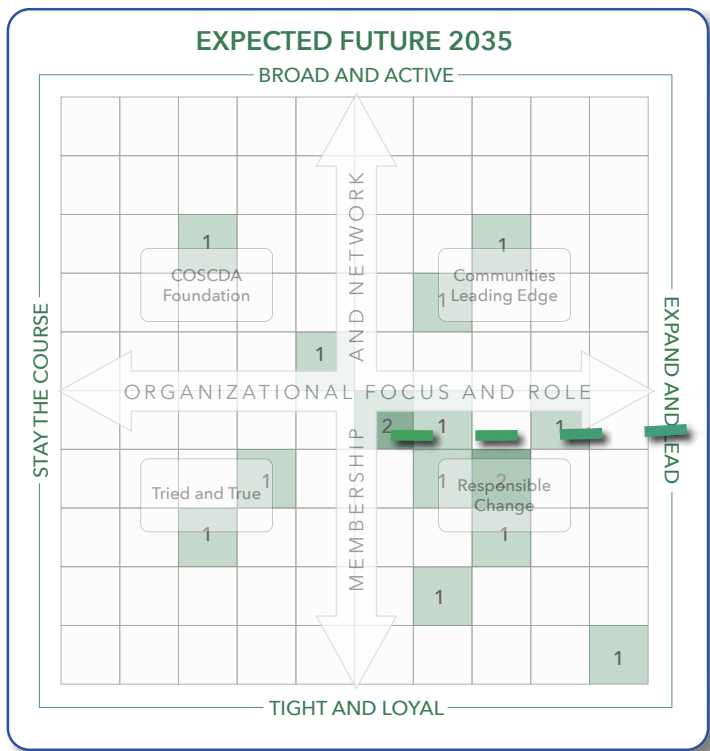
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- A definite preference for the 'Communities Leading Edge' scenario provides a clear mandate for COSCDA leadership and stakeholders to take actions that support that vision for the future of the organization.

- The responses highlight the desire for the future scenario of 'Communities Leading Edge', which requires significant movement on the 'Membership and Network' axis towards a more broad and active orientation.

"As an overall, COSCDA is a wonderful organization and has a huge opportunity for growth."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #2 Respondent

The future of 'Communities Leading Edge' reflects stakeholders' desire to plan for the future that builds on COSCDA's current success and reputation, and propels it to a national position of leadership in the areas of advocacy, housing, disaster recovery, and homelessness.

The visioning process allowed stakeholders to explore the future evolution of COSCDA around the two main themes of 'Organizational Focus and Role' and 'Membership and Network'. These themes allowed stakeholders to wrestle with the implications and responses to changing demographic makeup and needs of member states, climate change, and the emerging impact that technology and development is having on multiple aspects of the communities across the country.

The preferred future for COSCDA is identified as 'Communities Leading Edge'. The preferred future was described as:

COMMUNITIES LEADING EDGE

This scenario forecasts a future that sees the expansion of COSCDA's mission to provide more cutting-edge thought leadership, programs and training opportunities for its members and others in the areas of advocacy, housing, disaster recovery, and homelessness. Partnerships and collaboration with new agencies are forged. COSCDA becomes the branded expert advocacy voice for community development on a national level, including representation for other entities needing a voice with similar goals. A growing diversified funding stream provides for additional organizational and staffing capacity. This results in the ability to provide increased access to subject matter experts for trainings and up-to-date technical assistance at conferences and events. COSCDA's value proposition is recognized by an widening audience and membership grows. Membership categories are expanded with new levels that allow individuals and other agencies to join.

For more information on the Think-Tank and the description of 'Communities Cutting Edge', please visit **lab2.future-iq.com/coscda-strategic-action-plan-project/think-tank-workshops/**.
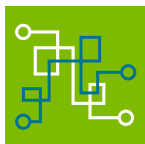
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- The preferred future, 'Communities Leading Edge' reflects stakeholders' ideal vision for the future of COSCDA. The vision was developed by COSCDA Board Members and Staff and lays out the guiding narrative for decision-making looking out to 2035.
- As communities emerge from the COVID pandemic and federal funding wanes, significant gaps in funding and services are emerging. COSCDA's leadership position in states' community development support and advocacy can be leveraged to help find solutions and new collaborative initiatives to fill these growing gaps.

The common thread running through all of the Focus Groups was the need for COSCDA to amplify its voice about its strengths and value to members and others. This storytelling will be an important element in the national positioning of the organization in the future.

Following the Think-Tank, a series of five Focus Groups were held to build out the Strategic Pillars of the COSCDA Strategic Action Plan. The purpose of the Focus Groups was to validate the preferred future and to gather strategic ideas on how to implement the steps needed to get o the preferred vision for the future of COSCDA. The stakeholder input from the five Focus Groups informed the Stakeholder Survey #2 and the development of the Action Areas of the Strategic Pillars of the Strategic Action Plan. Below are key ideas and takeaways that emerged from each of the Focus Groups.

MEMBERSHIP BASE AND POTENTIAL

- Amplify and show the value of COSCDA to its members; highlight consistency and strength in value of training programs
- Grow membership under Disaster Recovery, and gently add core partners and agencies to membership
- Consider adding new membership levels and options
- Continue to develop online resources for members
- Invest in curriculum development, training, and professional development for members
- Subsidize member participation at the annual conference and events (through scholarships and/or vendor sponsorships)
- Create a master list of what state departments do across the country
- Expand the COSCDA newsletter reach to governors and other leaders
- Expand connection areas with member organizations and increase individual contacts at all levels to address generational change and to build sustainability

PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

- Be directional and intentional about outreach efforts to other organizations; focus on relationships with HUD and Federal Agencies, USDA, EPA, NeighborWorks; build interagency understanding
- Amplify COSCDA's voice and thought leadership in CDBG sphere; around best practices
- Better explain existing partnerships to membership to show value of COSCDA
- Become a roundtable convener in strength areas of CDBG, Housing, Homelessness, Disaster Recovery (both at conferences and bringing together other parties to educate them on various priorities and topics)
- Explore HUD/FEMA 4-state pilot program around housing; possible presentation at COSCDA event to pursue thought leadership (topical roundtables)
- Seek out co-training opportunities with new partners; practical-specific collaborations
- Partner with national and local American Planning Associations (APA)
- Partner with agencies that will help membership with current needs (ex. Housing Authority for housing/homelessness)

ADVOCACY AND PROGRAMS

- Expand educational initiatives with Congress and the public about the merits of the CDGB program; build profile around areas of strength

- Educate policy makers about the negative impacts and inefficiencies of earmarks

- Build COSCDA's ability to find solutions to emerging challenges such as climate change and disaster recovery; highlight COSCDA's ability to be a problem-solver

- Continue to expand COSCDA's role in disaster recovery; host bootcamp regularly

- Build grassroots advocacy to strengthen positioning on the Hill; add 'Day on the Hill' back to the annual conference

- Explore advocacy opportunities caused by the gaps emerging in post-covid spending era; opportunity to prop up communities through CDBG/HUD programs

- Pursue constituent-based advocacy opportunities; improve communications with member states and congress

ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFF CAPACITY

- Focus on creating predictable revenue to support organizational and staff capacity

- When considering sponsorships, make sure the sponsors align with COSCDA's interests

- Expand training options for members by increasing training levels for CDGB from only mid-level to basic, mid-level and advanced

- Increase zoom trainings for members to increase access and value to members

- Increase revenue through collaboration with other agencies and organizations on events and trainings

- Expand disaster recovery bootcamp to occur regularly, also trainings in DR; host bootcamp in different locations around the country

- Open access to online materials to non-members on a fee basis

- Invest in staff capacity to increase visibility and impact; leverage the connections of the new COSCDA Executive Director to grow reputation

- Hire a staff trainer to allow Executive Director to focus on national positioning and partnership building

NATIONAL POSITIONING

- Develop a Communications Plan for COSCDA; build social media profile

- Continue to update the COSCDA website to serve member needs; help members to promote COSCDA at state and national levels

- Expand COSCDA's service role for members by building policy resources

- Enhance COSCDA's national media presence through its advocacy initiatives; build on the organization's solid reputation especially with Congress and HUD

- Foster greater recognition by promoting the 50th anniversaries of COSCDA and CDGB

- Strengthen current relationships on a Federal level; grow and solidify relationships in disaster recovery, Appropriations Committee, HUD and CPD

- Find a way to reengage with groups that over time have become less involved with COSCDA (example: National Governor's Association)

- Support and grow the ability of the Executive Director to enhance COSCDA's national positioning

5.1 | STRATEGIC PILLARS

The Strategic Pillars are an organizing framework to help identify actions that will enable COSCDA to pivot toward the preferred future for the organization.

The strategic themes and action areas are the building blocks of the Strategic Pillars that create the foundation of COSCDA's Strategic Action Plan.

Membership Base and Potential

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options

National Positioning

Exploring COSCDA's organizational role and positioning on a national level

Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations

Building on existing networks and creating new partnerships

COMMUNITIES LEADING EDGE

Organizational and Staff Capacity

Assessing current programming and staff capacity to meet organizational needs

Advocacy and Programs

Building on current successes and piloting potential new programs

The Strategic Actions represent a series of catalytic actions that will propel COSCDA towards the preferred future. They are intended to support existing programs and planning initiatives and to fill critical gaps.

Following the establishment of the Strategic Pillars, the specific Strategic Actions were developed to guide implementation of each Strategic Pillar.

PILLAR 1: MEMBERSHIP BASE AND POTENTIAL

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options

- Implement initiatives that continue to expand resources and support for members.
- Grow membership by offering innovative membership options.
- Strengthen member outreach and connections.

PILLAR 2: PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options

- Amplify COSCDA's voice and thought leadership.
- Be directional and intentional about outreach efforts with other agencies and organizations.
- Create new ways to partner with other agencies and organizations.

PILLAR 3: ADVOCACY AND PROGRAMS

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options

- Expand educational initiatives with Congress and the public.
- Build COSCDA's ability to find innovative solutions to emerging challenges.
- Build grassroots advocacy to strengthen positioning on the Hill.

PILLAR 4: ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFF CAPACITY

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options

- Expand training options at conferences and events.
- Increase revenue through creative initiatives.
- Invest in staff capacity to increase visibility and impact.

PILLAR 5: NATIONAL POSITIONING

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options

- Build Communications toolbox to better serve membership needs.
- Foster greater recognition of COSCDA and its role.
- Strengthen current relationships on a Federal level.

5.3 | STRATEGIC PILLAR 1: MEMBERSHIP BASE AND POTENTIAL

> Strengthening COSCDA's membership base will require clear messaging and education around the value of membership to states and prospective members.

Strengthening COSCDA's membership base and expanding membership options.

5.3.1 | IMPORTANCE OF MEMBERSHIP BASE AND POTENTIAL

COSCDA is an organization for the states and by the states, and its member services are the cornerstone of its mission and vision. The viability of a membership organization is dependent on establishing value and relevancy of its services for its members. COSCDA has done an exemplary job in providing critical support to its member states, and continues to evolve its services as needs arise. One area of growing need for states is in disaster recovery. This is a potential membership growth area for COSCDA as new organizations seek out COSCDA's expertise and training in this area. To elevate and maintain this high-level reputation for its services, COSCDA will need to amplify its voice and continue to show its value by highlighting the consistency and strength of its advocacy, policy development and implementation, technical assistance, education and networking services for its membership.

> "I think that COSCDA does a fantastic job serving its members. Trainings are available, input for conferences is requested regularly, committee meetings are available, etc. All of these things help all members of COSCDA and allow them to participate at their own level."
>
> - COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #1 Respondent
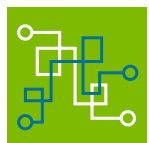
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- State membership in COSCDA hovers at around 46 out of 50 states, depending on the year and politics within the state. Growing membership significantly will require innovative solutions and must align with COSCDA's mission and vision.
- Stakeholder survey respondents and Focus Group participants do not support raising membership dues. Both groups indicated that raising dues would prevent groups from joining as state budgets are constrained.

1. IMPLEMENT INITIATIVES THAT CONTINUE TO EXPAND RESOURCES AND SUPPORT FOR MEMBERS.

COSCDA member needs are constantly changing as community development takes on new challenges that occur every day. COSCDA will need to invest in curriculum development, training, tools, and professional development for its members to support these evolving needs. Survey results show that continued online resource development is in great demand by members. Online resources increase access to critical information for more individuals within member organizations. Subsidizing member participation at the annual conference and events through scholarships and/or vendor sponsorship is an additional way that COSCDA can expand support for its members.

2. GROW MEMBERSHIP BY OFFERING INNOVATIVE MEMBERSHIP OPTIONS.

Current membership dues are based on the ability of member states to pay. By adding new membership levels and options, COSCDA has the opportunity to increase revenues and expand its membership base. The growing area of disaster recovery presents an additional opportunity to grow membership as COSCDA creates new training and technical assistance programs in that area. New innovative membership options will allow COSCDA to gently add core partners and agencies to its membership without straying from its core mission.

3. STRENGTHEN MEMBER OUTREACH AND CONNECTIONS.

In order for COSCDA to continue to provide high-quality membership services, the organization needs to continue to expand its connection areas with member organizations and other agencies using new technologies and approaches. This would include expanding its newsletter reach to governors and other leadership to increase awareness of COSCDA on state and national levels. COSCDA should also increase its individual contacts at member organizations to address generational change and to build sustainability for the organization.

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

- Increase online resources for members.
- Expand membership levels and options.
- Expand newsletter reach to governors and other leaders.
- Create a master list of what state departments do across the country.

5.4 | STRATEGIC PILLAR 2: PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Building on existing networks and creating new partnerships.

5.4.1 | IMPORTANCE OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS

Expanding COSCDA's reach to new partnerships with other agencies and organizations will provide the organization with added capacity to act on its mission and vision and to better serve its membership. Building partner alliances in advocacy, housing, disaster recovery and homelessness will be critical for COSCDA to maintain its relevancy, build organizational sustainability, and open growth opportunities in newly emerging areas. As COSCDA develops new partnerships, it will be important for leadership to amplify its voice and to provide clear messaging about the importance of these partnerships to its membership.

"CPD programs will continue to increase as critical investments are made to address housing, homelessness, and disaster recovery. Each of these programs provides opportunities for growth and expansion."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #1 Respondent

FutureInsight

- New diversified partnerships will help COSCDA to stay relevant for its membership, especially in new areas such as disaster recovery.
- Expanded partner alliances will increase COSCDA's capacity to grow deeper networks in its strength areas, and access more specialty knowledge and resources for its members.

1. AMPLIFY COSCDA'S VOICE AND THOUGHT LEADERSHIP IN THE CDBG SPHERE.

In order to build on COSCDA's preeminent voice in CDBG at the state and federal levels, Board Members and Staff have indicated a clear desire to build partnerships with other agencies and organizations. Its current partnerships are focused in the areas of housing, community development, homelessness, and community action partnerships. Disaster recovery is a growing area where COSCDA could expand its partnerships. COSCDA can take a leadership role by becoming a roundtable convener, both at conferences and in bringing together other parties to educate them on various priorities, topics, and best practices.

2. BE DIRECTIONAL AND INTENTIONAL ABOUT OUTREACH EFFORTS WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS.

COSCDA has the opportunity to strengthen its practical partnerships with agencies such as USDA, EPA, HUD, and NeighborWorks by being directional and intentional about its outreach efforts. Initiatives that build interagency understanding and connections should be pursued. These collaborations have the potential to open the door to new funding resources and networks.

3. CREATE NEW WAYS TO PARTNER WITH OTHER AGENCIES AND ORGANIZATIONS.

Board members have indicated a strong interest in creating new ways to partner with other agencies that will help membership with current needs (for example, Housing Authority for housing and homelessness, or national and local American Planning Associations around comprehensive planning). These new partnerships can be practical-specific and include co-training opportunities and collaborations. One specific idea that was suggested during the Focus Groups was the exploration of HUD/FEMA state pilot programs around housing, with the possibility of a panel discussion or topical roundtable at a COSCDA event.

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

- Develop informational narrative on COSCDA's partnerships and share with membership.
- Create a database of current COSCDA partnerships.
- Add topical roundtables that focus on the tough subjects states are dealing with to the annual conference.
- Seek out co-training and partnering opportunities with other agencies and organizations.

## 5.5 | STRATEGIC PILLAR 3: ADVOCACY AND PROGRAMS

Building on current successes and piloting potential new programs.

5.5.1 | IMPORTANCE OF ADVOCACY AND PROGRAMS

Advocacy for the common community development goals of member states is a building block of COSCDA's mission. COSCDA will continue to advocate on behalf of member states to ensure that federal policies, programs, and funding that COSCDA members currently rely on remain secure. COSCDA will also continue to look for and advocate for opportunities to broaden the funding base for its members in the areas of housing, homelessness and disaster recovery. Advocating for the codification of disaster recovery by HUD will be an important focus over the next three years of this strategic plan. Concurrently with its advocacy efforts, COSCDA will continue to build programs and services that support members' evolving needs.

"Obviously the advocacy work needs to continue – there are so many changes coming as well as changes still needed and the work COSCDA does on that front allows all of our voices to be heard and in some cases, listened to."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #1 Respondent
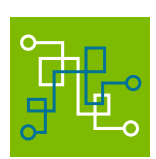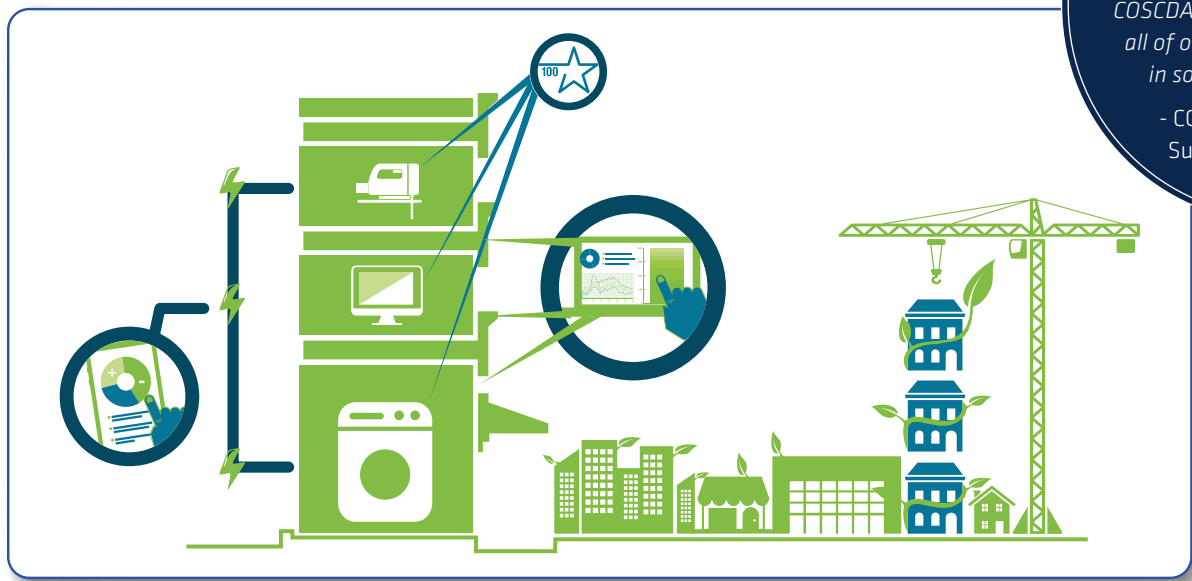
FutureInsight

- The slow and tedious process of growing grassroots advocacy is difficult, but necessary for COSCDA's future. Adding the 'Day on the Hill' and other connections for members will be critical to strengthening the organization's visibility and strength on the Hill.

- The disaster recovery space is an important area for COSCDA to gain a strong foothold in advocating for member states needs. The development of programs such as trainings and educational opportunities for members opens up an important leadership opportunity for COSCDA.

1. EXPAND EDUCATIONAL INITIATIVES WITH CONGRESS AND THE PUBLIC.

To increase its visibility and to create greater understanding of the complexities pertaining to community development, COSCDA will need to expand its education initiatives with Congress and the public about the merits of the CDGB program and its advocacy around the areas of housing, homelessness, and disaster recovery. This would include efforts to educate policy makers about the negative impacts and inefficiencies of earmarks. Improving communications with member states and Congress will encourage dialogue with member organizations and allow a fuller understanding of what member states need from local and federal policy makers.

2. BUILD COSCDA'S ABILITY TO FIND INNOVATIVE SOLUTIONS TO EMERGING CHALLENGES.

COSCDA has built a strong reputation for being a problem-solver for member states. The organization can build on this ability by tackling the emerging challenges of climate change and disaster recovery. The recent bootcamp for disaster recovery was a great success and should be continued regularly as needs are evolving and changing. A Focus Group suggestion was to host the bootcamp in different locations across the United States to diversify training needs and expand participation by members and other agencies or organizations.

3. BUILD GRASSROOTS ADVOCACY TO STRENGTHEN POSITIONING ON THE HILL.

With its already strong voice on the Hill, COSCDA has the opportunity to build more grassroots advocacy to strengthen its positioning on the Hill. A potential growth area would be to explore advocacy opportunities caused by the emerging gaps in the post-covid spending era. With federal funding drying up, COSCDA can use this opportunity to pursue constituent-based advocacy opportunities that prop up communities through CDG and HUD programs. COSCDA could also add its 'Day on the Hill' back into the annual conference to improve communications with member states and to educate states about the role COSCDA advocacy plays.

"I believe that COSCDA has a huge opportunity for growth in the training and professional development category."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #2 Respondent

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

• Develop educational initiatives around the merits of the CDGB program
• Expand COSCDA's role in disaster recovery; host bootcamp regularly
• Add 'Day on the Hill' back to the COSCDA annual conference
• Research advocacy opportunities caused by gaps emerging in post-covid era

Building COSCDA's organizational and staff capacity will support the implementation of COSCDA's new Strategic Action Plan.

Assessing current programming and staff capacity to meet organizational needs.

5.6.1 | IMPORTANCE OF ORGANIZATIONAL AND STAFF CAPACITY

Getting COSCDA's organizational and staff capacity right will be key to implementing the new Strategic Action Plan. One of COSCDA's greatest strengths is its highly capable and dedicated Staff. Throughout the planning process, the Board and Members have indicated a keen interest in providing additional support to Staff as the organization builds out its training programs at conferences and events, maintains its high-quality service to Members, and seeks to take on more of a leadership role in the disaster recovery space. The support needed will require a consistent predictable revenue stream that the organization can count on in the long run. The action steps of this Strategic Action Plan outline several options that can be taken in the near-term to put the organization on this trajectory.

"I think another position that focuses on committee support and training would be great. I think we ask a lot of Tess, Josh, Angel, and Ed, and some additional support is warranted at the staff level."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #1 Respondent
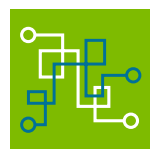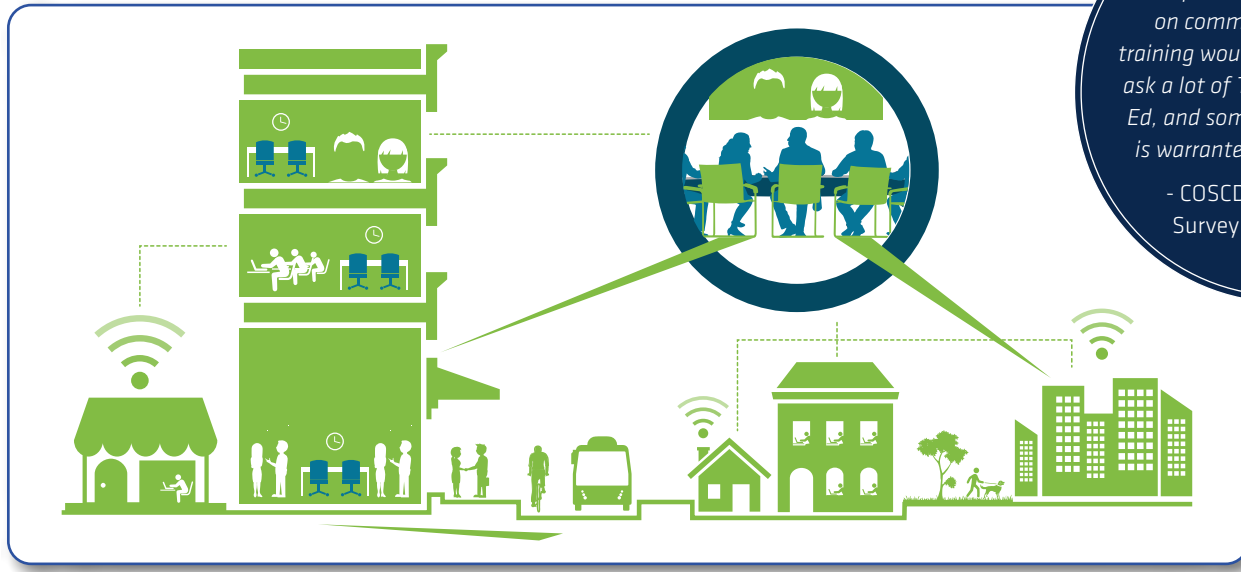
FutureInsight

- COSCDA is at a point in time where it has the opportunity to reassess its organizational and staff capacity to meet the changing needs of its membership and to amplify its leadership goals on the national level. The strategic planning process has shown there is significant support for this assessment to take place as part of the implementation of the Strategic Action Plan.

- Having the proper staff in place to carry out COSCDA's vision and mission is a key component of serving the needs of member organizations. Staff are also a vital link between the Board and its membership.

1. EXPAND TRAINING OPTIONS AT CONFERENCES AND EVENTS.

COSCDA training at conferences and events is one of the most important services that the organization provides to its members. Trainings are also one of the most reliable revenue sources, thus providing considerable stability for the organization. Expanding training options to Members, especially in new areas of need should be pursued over the next three years. Expanding training levels for CDBG to basic, mid-level and advanced sessions is one option. Increasing the occurrence of disaster recovery bootcamps and additional trainings is another option. Survey results indicate a strong interest in zoom trainings for Members to increase access and value to members.

2. INCREASE REVENUE THROUGH CREATIVE INITIATIVES.

Increasing revenue for COSCDA requires a proactive approach to creating a predictable revenue stream to support the growth of organizational and staff capacity. Increasing revenue through collaboration with other agencies and organizations on events and trainings aligns well with Board Member desire to increase partnerships with other agencies and organizations. Investment in curriculum development that opens access to online materials to non-members on a fee-basis should also be considered. Vendor sponsorships are often a useful tool to raise revenue, however care should be taken to align the vendor with COSCDA's interests to prevent a misalignment of messaging to the membership.

3. INVEST IN STAFF CAPACITY TO INCREASE VISIBILITY AND IMPACT.

Increasing COSCDA's visibility and impact will require additional staffing, especially in the area of trainings. This is an exciting time for COSCDA, as the new Executive Director brings new connections to the organization. Currently the Executive Director is responsible for the coordination of trainings and other work that takes up valuable time that could be used to focus on national positioning, resource and partnership building. A Training Coordinator could work with the states to update training materials, organize and lead sessions, and develop additional training offerings.

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

• Increase training levels for CDBG to basic, mid-level, and advanced

• Increase zoom trainings for members

• Invest in curriculum development and open access to online materials to non-members on a fee-basis.

• Hire a staff trainer / coordinator to support training and curriculum development.

Exploring COSCDA's organization role and positioning on a national level.

5.7.1 | IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL POSITIONING

As an organization that advocates for state agencies across the United States, building COSCDA's reputation on the national level is critical. COSCDA currently plays a national leadership role in advocating for and enhancing the leadership role of states in the area of community development. In a rapidly changing environment, it will be important for COSCDA to remain agile in its ability to respond to the evolving needs of its membership as they arise. Clear and consistent communications with member states will be essential. Continuing to deepen relationships on a federal level will also be important. Celebrating and promoting the 50th anniversaries of both COSCDA and CDBG is an opportunity to have some fun with this Strategic Pillar in 2024.

> **COSCDA has a unique opportunity to further develop its position on the national level by anticipating and harnessing opportunities for policy change as they occur.**
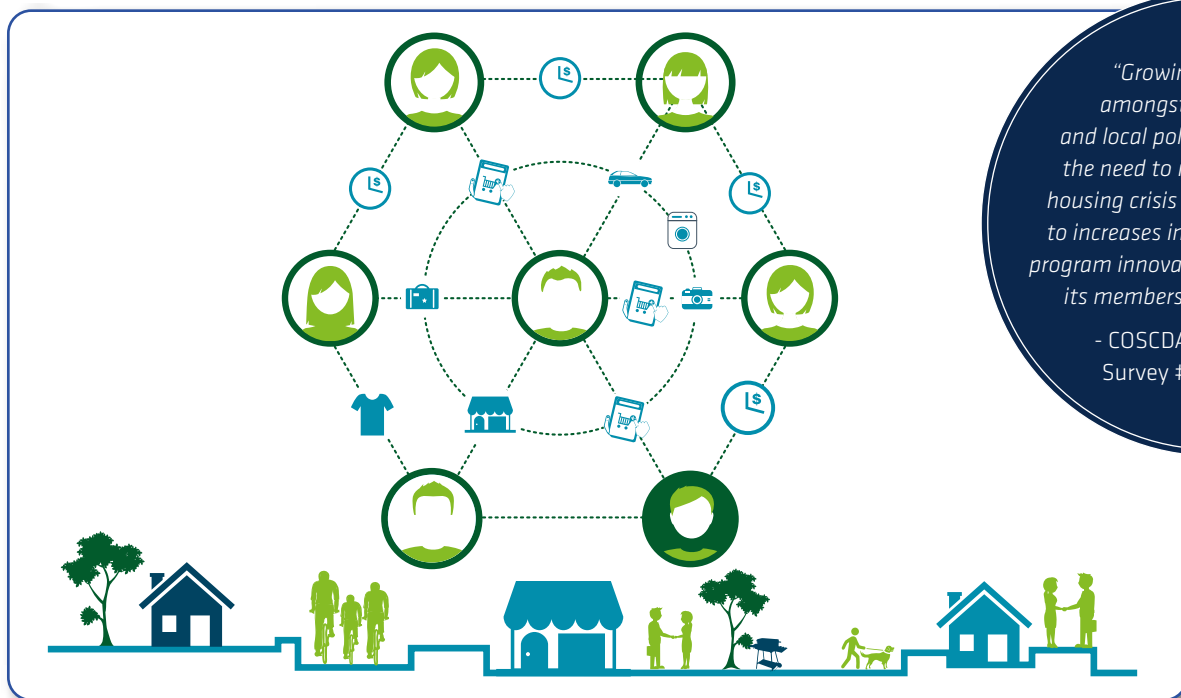
> *"Growing recognition amongst federal, state, and local political leaders about the need to respond to growing housing crisis may (hopefully) lead to increases in funding and policy/program innovation that COSCDA and its members could help shape."*
>
> - COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #1 Respondent
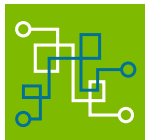
FutureInsight

- COSCDA's preeminent voice in community development can be used to spearhead leadership in identifying and being a key player around emerging opportunities in relevant areas such as housing, homelessness, and disaster recovery.
- The 50th anniversaries in 2024 of both COSCDA and CDBG present an outsized opportunity to promote and raise awareness of their relationship and importance.

1. BUILD COMMUNICATIONS TOOLBOX TO BETTER SERVE MEMBERSHIP NEEDS.

COSCDA currently does not have a Communications Plan to align its messaging across mediums. A new Communications Plan can be used to build COSCDA's policy resources for members, and develop a social media profile on a national level. The plan can also guide website development that supports members' evolving needs. This Strategic Action Plan recommends the creation of a communications toolbox that can be used by members to promote COSCDA at state and national levels.

2. FOSTER GREATER RECOGNITION OF COSCDA AND ITS ROLE.

A significant element in national positioning is building the brand of COSCDA to foster greater recognition of the organization and its role. This function will increasingly fall on the Executive Director, and the Board recognizes the need to support and grow the Executive Director's ability to enhance the organization's national positioning amongst its peer agencies. COSCDA can also enhance its national media presence through its advocacy initiatives. It should be noted that this year in particular can be used to foster greater recognition by promoting the 50th anniversaries of both COSCDA and CDBG.

3. STRENGTHEN CURRENT RELATIONSHIPS ON A FEDERAL LEVEL.

Over the past 50 years, COSCDA has built a solid reputation with Congress and HUD. These efforts should continue and additional initiatives should be developed to grow and solidify relationships in disaster recovery, HUD, CPD, and the Appropriations Committee. COSCDA can further develop its national positioning by find ways to reengage with groups that over time have become less involved with COSCDA (for example: National Governor's Association).

NEAR-TERM IMPLEMENTATION STEPS:

- Develop a Communications Toolbox for COSCDA that includes a Communications Plan, building social media profile and updating website.
- Enhance COSCDA's national media presence.
- Promote the 50th anniversaries of COSCDA and CDBG.
- Reengage groups that have become less involved in COSCDA.

The following matrix presents suggested near-term implementation action steps for each strategic pillar of the COSCDA Strategic Action Plan. It should be noted that the timeframe for this plan is three years. These strategic Actions are intended to help propel COSCDA to the identified preferred future for the organization, 'Communities Leading Edge.' Each Action Step is identified by Pillar, Timing, and Responsible Party/Partners.

IMPLEMENTATION MATRIX

Action Step	Pillar	Timing	Responsible Party / Partners
Increase online resources for members.	P1 - Membership Base and Potential	2024	COSCDA Board, Staff and Committees
Expand membership levels and options.	P1 - Membership Base and Potential	2025	COSCDA Board and Staff
Expand newsletter reach to governors and other leaders.	P1 - Membership Base and Potential	2024	COSCDA Staff
Create a master list of what state departments do across the country.	P1 - Membership Base and Potential	2025	COSCDA Staff
Develop informational narrative on COSCDA's partnerships and share with membership.	P2 - Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations	2024	COSCDA Staff
Create a database of current COSCDA partnerships.	P2 - Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations	2024 + Ongoing	COSCDA Staff
Add topical roundtables that focus on the tough subjects states are dealing with to the annual conference.	P2 - Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations	2025-2026	COSCDA Board and Committees
Seek out co-training and partnering opportunities with other agencies and organizations.	P2 - Partnerships with Other Agencies and Organizations	2025-2026	COSCDA Board, Committees, and Staff
Develop educational initiatives around the merits of the CDGB program.	P3 – Advocacy and Programs	2025	COSCDA Committees
Expand COSCDA's role in disaster recovery; host bootcamp regularly.	P3 – Advocacy and Programs	2025	COSCDA Committees
Add 'Day on the Hill' back to the COSCDA annual conference.	P3 – Advocacy and Programs	2025	COSCDA Committees
Research advocacy opportunities caused by gaps emerging in post-covid era.	P3 – Advocacy and Programs	2024-2025	COSCDA Staff

Action Step	Pillar	Timing	Responsible Party / Partners
Increase training levels for CDBG to basic, mid-level, and advanced	P4 - Organizational and Staff Capacity	2025-2026	COSCDA Staff and Committees
Increase zoom trainings for members.	P4 - Organizational and Staff Capacity	2025	COSCDA Staff and Committees
Invest in curriculum development and open access to online materials to non-members on a fee-basis.	P4 - Organizational and Staff Capacity	2026	COSCDA Staff and Committees
Hire a staff trainer to support training and curriculum development.	P4 - Organizational and Staff Capacity	2025	COSCDA Board
Develop a Communications Toolbox for COSCDA that includes a Communications Plan, building social media profile and updating website.	P5 – National Positioning	2024-2025	COSCDA Board and Staff
Enhance COSCDA's national media presence.	P5 – National Positioning	2024	COSCDA Staff
Promote the 50th anniversaries of COSCDA and CDBG.	P5 – National Positioning	2024	COSCDA Board and Staff
Reengage groups that have become less involved in COSCDA.	P5 – National Positioning	2024+ Ongoing	COSCDA Board and Staff

7.0 | NEXT STEPS

COSCDA stakeholders have undergone an extensive visioning and strategic planning process that has resulted in the following outcomes:

- Documented a detailed understanding of stakeholder views on the organization and its potential as it relates to planning for the future.

- Allowed detailed examination of plausible future scenarios, explored least desired, expected, and preferred futures, and built an understanding of the implications of these future options.

- Identified a vision for the future of COSCDA, acknowledging that there are a variety of viewpoints and perspectives, with a majority in a central range.

- Identified key strategic pillars and action areas to implement the COSCDA Strategic Action Plan.

This work has been built on extensive participation by COSCDA Board Members, Staff, and its Members. The vision for the Strategic Action Plan looks out to 2035 and provides guidance to leadership for the next three years.

The next phase of work now needs to begin. The following immediate steps are recommended:

- Consideration and approval of the COSCDA Strategic Action Plan by the COSCDA Board of Directors.

- Implementation of key elements of Strategic Action Plan through COSCDA's various committees.

"COSCDA leadership does a great job of balancing the differing interests and focuses of different states and of developing a sound advocacy program. The training programs are excellent."

- COSCDA Strategic Plan Survey #1 Respondent

8.0 | FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information on COSCDA's strategic planning project, please contact:

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9.0 | CONSULTING TEAM – ABOUT FUTURE iQ

Future iQ specializes in applying innovative tools and approaches to assist municipalities, organizations, regions and industries shape their economic and community futures. With nearly two decades of experience, the company has a global clientele spanning three continents. To learn more about Future iQ, and our recent projects visit **www.future-iq.com** or by email at **info@future-iq.com**.

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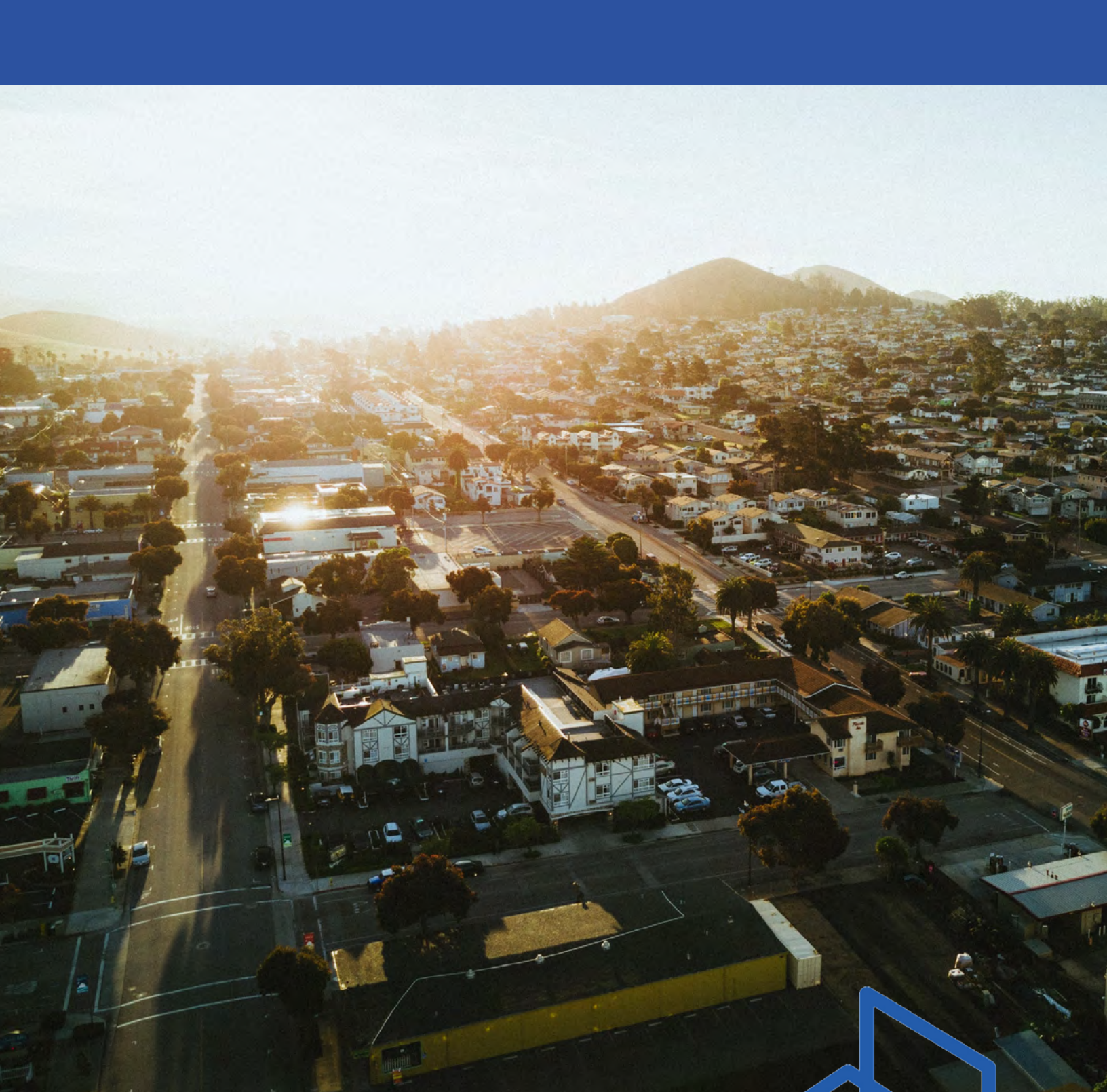
BRITTANY REMPE

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Data Engineer

To explore more about the COSCDA strategic planning process, please visit the project portal at:

lab2.future-iq.com/coscda-strategic-action-plan-project/

COUNCIL OF STATE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES (COSCDA)

STRATEGIC ACTION PLAN REPORT

WASHINGTON, DC   APRIL 2024

COSCDA

Council of State Community
Development Agencies