

Strategic Plan 2012 - 2015

Prepared for



By:

DANOSKY ASSOCIATES

Consulting not-for-profit organizations

ENGAGING PHILANTHROPY ... EMPOWERING YOUR CAUSE

P O Box 396

Sherman, CT 06784

860-799-6330

Table of Contents

Strategic Plan 2012-2015

<u>Mission, Values, Vision</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Barriers to Success</u>	<u>5</u>
• <u>Mission Margin Matrix</u>	<u>5</u>
• <u>Potential Opportunities</u>	<u>5</u>
• <u>Barriers to Success</u>	<u>6</u>
<u>Objectives & Strategies</u>	<u>7</u>

Strategic Plan: Mission, Values and Vision



Over the course of its 42 years, RC&D has played an integral role in building coalitions, and building cooperation among multiple entities. This role and made it possible for RC&D to promote resource conservation among its partners, help partnership groups build capacity and facilitate and promote resources. In this role, RC&D has been a catalyst for action and filled many organizational gaps that helped eastern CT maintain a healthy environment.

It has conducted its work in a number of ways from delegating responsibility to those groups that have specific plans for implementation, providing funds through grants and promoting regional cooperation for sustainability. It also served as fiscal intermediary for a number of groups.

There are three primary programs that RC&D is now administering:

- Environmental Review Team—a free service to all towns. RC&D along with the ERT staff puts together a team to investigate the feasibility of the project
- CT Farm Energy Program—promotes and provides information (and funding to write grants) to farmers to apply for federal funds
- AGvocate Program—helps towns to set up agriculture commissions

If RC&D were to cease its work, there would be an impact. The board base of expertise and representation would be lost as both an idea generator and overseer. The work that RC&D is currently doing would most likely be distributed over a wide range of other organizations, without the central vision and facilitation RC&D brings. Its greatest strength lies in the coalition and collaborations it is able to foster because of those groups sitting around the table. There would always been a need for a body to develop the partnerships. RC&D also serves as the conduit to funding, is able to generate specific grants for collaborative initiatives and fills a unique niche that would be missed.

The effectiveness of its mission can be viewed from the perspective of its primary value proposition of being partner-centered and coalition-based, as three perspectives are described below:

- 1) RC&D facilitates and promotes resource networks that ensure the long-term viability of historic, natural and economic resources of the communities in the RC&D area
- 2) RC&D offers a coordinated approach to growth and economic development focused on a strong rural economy, public transportation and concentrated on healthy development

- 3) RC&D is a statewide organization that convenes active coordination with local, rural, state and federal governments

It is this focus on partnerships that ultimately defines RC&D's new mission.



Eastern Connecticut RC&D champions partnerships and initiatives that sustain our natural and agricultural resources while strengthening our economy.

With the question of future funding, coupled with RC&D redefining its mission, there is an inherent challenge of envisioning the future direction of the organization. There are some apparent areas; however, where RC&D plays a significant role and the continuation and expansion of that role is seen as critical to many communities. One area in particular is building capacity for agricultural viability. While not an exclusive area of concentration for RC&D, it is an area where it has had a profound impact. Another area of note is the role of being an historic, environmental resource and the ability to educate the community as it relates to those areas. RC&D also has a very strong network of key “players” between those who sit around the table and their own spheres of influence, in addition to an effective staff. This has been used as leverage to build effective programs.

There are also a number of areas where RC&D has not been able to have the influence it would like, such as not having the ability to advocate for its mission legislatively and otherwise. This is due to the governance structure, with many of those serving on the Board having another role in the area of planning and resource utilization and such advocacy being seen as a potential conflict of interest. This has also limited the Board's ability to serve as ambassadors for RC&D, raise funds or awareness and play a role where RC&D is their foremost priority. This in no way has undermined the role and activities they have undertaken, but rather, presents an opportunity to address through a reconfigured governance structure as the organization moves forward.

The key elements for RC&D to have in its vision statement reflect the opportunity RC&D has in reframing its role, building upon its current track record and seizing opportunities that exist.

VISION

RC&D will be recognized as a leader in promoting and facilitating the following:

- Better land use decision at the local level through education and outreach

- Increase in agricultural production, promoting a healthier food system
- A more viable working landscape and ecosystem
- Greater regional communication and coordination in resource planning



Strategic Plan: Barriers to Success

Funding is the primary long-range concern. RC&D has set aside reserves, including ERT funding which needs to be resolved so the short-term funding concerns are not an immediate issue. This allows RC&D to plan strategically to address its role, mission, and services to fulfill a vision.

Mission Margin Matrix

With a backdrop of services that will create a significant gap if they were not to be provided, an evaluation of the barriers to success first identifies the current services and the potential risk.

The mission/margin matrix presented an interesting challenge and identified areas of consideration moving forward. Many of the programs that are now being done by RC&D would fall into the category of high mission/high margin. However, once the federal funding loss is realized, they move over to the high mission/low margin column. These services are:

- Advocate
- Farm energy program
- Soil workshops
- Slaughterhouse Study
- Peat Study
- ERT
- Brownfields
- Greenways
- State Outsource
- Federal Outsource
- Fiscal agent

Potential Opportunities

In addition to the opportunities presented by the existing services, there are several opportunities for RC&D that are not currently being explored. These are areas where RC&D's talent and expertise could play a role, in addition to the organization itself structuring itself in a way that it could provide even greater benefit.

1. Conducting cost benefit analysis/evaluation and developing outcome measures for reporting progress and success on initiatives as a benefit and education tool
2. Undertaking greater outreach to municipalities and becoming more of a resource



3. Creating a stronger urban connection
4. Providing more education and training
5. Offering greater interface with the agricultural community
6. Reducing the duplication and redundancy among similar organizations
7. Delivering a statewide vision of resource conservation and development
8. Convening many organizations and individuals
9. Providing the vehicle for collaboration and funding
10. Filling the gaps in communities as it relates to resource and conservation needs

Barriers to Success

The current organizational infrastructure, governance structure and lack of administrative staff significantly impact the potential benefit the organization could have. In order for RC&D to move forward with its revised mission and vision, there are specific areas which must be addressed. These areas are listed below and form the strategies that will guide the organization over the next two-three years.

1. Lack of staff and administrative support particularly the position of Executive Director
2. Uncertain funding streams
3. The lack of definition of member organizations to the Council and its role
4. Limited participation from the Board
5. Conflicting role of Board members - many have jobs that take a priority over that of RC&D
6. Limited community outreach; Board does not play an ambassadorial role
7. No organizational promotion or outreach
8. Difficulty in prioritizing projects and identifying new needs
9. Inadequate representation from community development groups (versus conservation)
10. The risk averse nature of the Board
11. The need to develop consistency of thought or approach in addressing projects and issues.

Strategic Plan: Objectives and Strategies



There are two primary objectives for RC&D to undertake to fulfill its mission and work toward its vision:

1. Build organizational capacity - the lack of organizational capacity is significantly hindering RC&D's ability to move forward. This ranges from not having appropriate administrative staff and leadership to the role and responsibility of the Board. There is also a need to clarify the roles of current staff and create mechanisms to direct and manage staff going forward.
2. Determine the optimum services and partnerships - with precarious funding, yet a strong opportunity and track record in bringing partners together to meet shared goals, RC&D has to carefully evaluate the specific services, partnerships and revenue streams for it to move forward.

To accomplish these two objectives, six strategies are recommended. These strategies should be completed within two years, allowing one more year for evaluation and follow-up. Key strategies should be put into place immediately and many are recommended for year one.

- 1) Build an administrative infrastructure.

Develop a staffing plan that begins with hiring an Executive Director. The Executive Director is a pivotal role that will help guide the organization through its other capacity and program building strategies. It is essential that the individual is able to build partnerships in the community, understand the key principles in resource conservation and development and also be able to lead the Board and volunteers in securing additional revenue streams (i.e., grant-writing and philanthropy). There are different options to consider in hiring the position.

 - a. Part-time Position. This is the least costly; however, it might not secure the caliber of talent required or provide adequate time to accomplish the work that needs to be done.
 - b. Full-time, experienced professional. This is the most desirable; however, is also the most costly as it assumes the individual has the experience to build the organization and the skill sets required to implement both the strategies and tactics. It is also the riskiest as it requires an individual to commit during what can be a potentially difficult building period.
 - c. Full-time professional with less experience who is assuming this type of position for the first time. This requires a strong



learning curve on the part of the individual and patience on the part of the Board. However, it has the greatest potential for longevity and commitment. Often, this position is augmented by a consultant to help with the orientation and building process.

2) Adjust the governing structure.

The current Board has considerable programmatic/planning talent and expertise. In addition to providing this skill set, there is also an expectation of providing governance and financial oversight, (including fundraising,). Many Board members also serve as ambassadors of their organization they represent. Because RC&D's Board have similar roles with an organization where they are employed, there is a strong potential for conflict if they assume some of the traditional governing roles. An alternative structure should be considered that will retain the talent and expertise, but provide a viable option for governance and oversight. There are various options to explore, such as:

- a. Establish a Program Advisory Council utilizing much of the talent RC&D currently has. This group would be responsible for determining the best programs and evaluating their effectiveness. Their recommendation would have to be approved by the Board; however, it is possible to address their authority in making recommendations in the by-laws.
- b. The Board would have the primary governing responsibility, with financial oversight, playing the role of ambassadors in the communities, developing networks and undertaking fundraising if necessary.

3) Establish a program evaluation process

Regardless of the governing structure, a committee is required to provide criteria and advice on program selection and review outcomes of the work RC&D does. This work will include assessing ongoing services to ensure they are fulfilling the mission and advancing the vision, conducting gap analysis to address unmet needs in the communities and evaluate outcomes to achieve maximum effectiveness. The growth of this committee will help secure additional funding from various sources, though they have no direct responsibility for funding.

4) Define and develop partnerships

One of the greatest strengths of RC&D is the development of key partnerships and alliances. The current Board structure and lack of staffing has made this difficult and not optimized its greatest strength. The potential for conflict of interests has also played a role in not achieving more in terms of outreach. This is a role that can be furthered

by the Board and the Executive Director and will be informed by the program evaluation process.

5) Develop an outreach strategy

The work of RC&D often flies under the radar. This can have a potentially detrimental effect in that the work is not always visibly attributable to RC&D and the ability to promote its services is difficult. It is also important to develop critical relationships utilizing the huge networking potential of the Board. These would be facilitated by the Executive Director, who would also engage with local municipalities to identify potential need for services and collaborations. As RC&D explores potential revenue streams, the importance of promoting RC&D's work to the public heightens as it may be necessary to engage fundraising. Finally, a key role of RC&D is education: outreach and publicity are the cornerstones of those initiatives.

6) Establish a finance plan

The finance plan is dependent on program directives and the infrastructure (capacity) required in undertaking the work to be done. Analysis on potential funding sources and the gaps in funding should be evaluated. Fundraising should be considered and if it is a viable alternative, a fundraising plan should be developed. Also factored into the mix is the funding required to conduct viable outreach and education initiatives.

A summary of these strategies is provided as part of the Executive Summary, along with projected timelines. The majority of these strategies will be implemented within the first year, particularly addressing the infrastructure, governance, program evaluation and a finance plan. Building partnerships and conducting outreach may be implemented during year two. It will be important to conduct an ongoing assessment of the strategies as they are implemented and seek appropriate resources that can serve as a guide.

The recommendations are significant in that they represent a fundamental organizational change to meet the current challenges. However, they are provided within the context of the overarching track record and ongoing need for the services that have been performed with notable expertise by RC&D in the past decades.

