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UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN

Advancing Sustainable Growth in the Grand Traverse Region through the Power of People & Metrics

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[1]"Land Acknowledgement." (2021). *School for Environment and Sustainability*. Retrieved from https://seas.umich.edu/about

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Executive Summary

Great Lakes coastal communities experience unique cultural and environmental challenges, yet these communities share similar opportunities to leverage local water amenities to create vibrant, attractive, and progressive environments. To mitigate challenges and leverage opportunities, leaders across the basin are working to advance collaborative frameworks that inspire sustainable growth and community resilience along the Great Lakes coasts. The Grand Traverse region, located on the coast of Lake Michigan in the northwest portion of Michigan's lower peninsula, is one example of these efforts.

The Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation (GTRCF) serves five counties across Northwest Lower Michigan and is recognized for their role in gathering regional actors. In 2019, they mobilized interdisciplinary leaders to form the Community Development Coalition of Northwest Michigan (Coalition), whose aim is to guide collaborative and intentional growth throughout the region. However, the group faces lingering hesitancy due to inaction following prior collaborative efforts. Consequently, the Coalition's success hinges on their ability to shift from planning to action in a coordinated and impactful way. To support these efforts, we worked closely with the GTRCF and Coalition, from January 2019 through April 2021, to identify key strategies for initiating and sustaining long-term progress toward regional goals. Our research also studied the role that water plays in unifying collaborative efforts in coastal communities.

We interviewed 19 leaders from six Great Lakes coastal communities and 17 members from the Grand Traverse region, then evaluated our findings using the qualitative data analysis software, NVivo. We synthesized our findings in a series of case studies that outline common themes for success in collaborative efforts in other Great Lakes coastal communities. Case study interviewees shared valuable insights into the successes and missteps of their own attempts at community and regional change, providing us with an understanding of potential challenges the Coalition may face. We then organized themes gleaned from the Grand Traverse community into strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats surrounding Coalition efforts going forward. It was apparent from our local interviews that the region is full of vibrant leaders who are excited to advance regional sustainability goals.

Our findings informed the following recommendations for Coalition action and implementation: (1) establish an active and direct approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion, (2) Intensify efforts to develop a unifying purpose and coordinate action, (3) Expand Coalition partnerships and optimize collaborative efforts, (4) enhance communication and engagement with the public, and (5) be intentional with data tracking and progress sharing. While these recommendations are designed for the Coalition, their implications can be leveraged in other collaborative efforts across the Great Lakes region.

Context and Purpose

The environmental movement of the 1960s began with a primary focus on the protection and preservation of natural resources. Today, it has evolved into a sustainability movement, recognizing not just environmental aspects, but also related social and economic links, with the three components being collectively referred to as the triple bottom line. Accomplishing sustainable outcomes within a triple bottom line framework requires collaboration across sectors, with the intent of developing and advancing overall resiliency and vibrancy of the community.

Leaders across the Great Lakes basin are putting sustainability frameworks into practice, striving to work across sectors and jurisdictions to advance environmental programs that often highlight the economic and social values of the region's exceptional freshwater resources. A prominent example of regional success is the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which allocates federal funding to protect and restore Great Lakes resources. The initiative has achieved broad support and increased funding as a result of collaboration around clear goals and a unified message.[2] However, smaller-scale sustainability efforts in the region have progressed with mixed outcomes. Without a clear guideline or template for localized success, some communities have made great progress, while others have struggled to maintain momentum in their efforts towards sustainability.

The Great Lakes form an extensive and complex coastal network with over 10,000 miles of shoreline and a basin that spans eight states and two Canadian provinces.[3] The region has been commonly referred to as North America's Third Coast or Fresh Coast. Although less studied or recognized, the countless communities situated along these coasts have unique opportunities to collaboratively leverage a shared identity and a passion for local water resources, with the potential to create a more unified and effective approach to sustainability. These coastal communities make up a strong network that provides a rich dialogue around Great Lakes issues. This structure allows actors across parties and sectors to find innovative and collaborative mechanisms to advance shared governance around regional sustainability efforts that address social, environmental, and economic facets of a community.

Unifying around a shared water identity provides a sustainable, cross-sector foundation for both economic and social health of coastal communities. The relationship between the economy and Great Lakes environmental resources has been studied by many. Austin and Steinman (2015) highlighted sub-regions with innovative and influential water-based economies. They described how communities are adapting to the decline of industrial coastal economies and shifting their identities to embrace a movement leveraging the economic value of local natural resources. Interconnected with economic and environmental facets are the associated impacts to the people living in these communities. Rutty and Goralnik (2020) discussed the positive impacts of water restoration projects on community wellbeing. Their analysis reveals that developing accessible processes and social networks are critical to catalyzing action toward shared goals and diverse opportunities (Rutty and Goralnik, 2020). When leveraged in unison, environmental, economic, and societal considerations can create vibrant communities, that are characterized by

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[2] "Great Lakes Restoration: About". (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.glri.us/about.

[3] "Physical Features of the Great Lakes." (n.d.) Retrieved from https://www.epa.gov/greatlakes/physical-features-great-lakes.

strong social networks, resilient processes, collective agency, and positive connection of people to place (Rutty and Goralnik, 2020).

Regional Development in Northwest Lower Michigan

The Grand Traverse region sits along the northwest coast of Michigan's lower peninsula. Spanning from the world-famous Sleeping Bear Dunes, through Traverse City, all the way to the rich rivers and natural landscapes of central Michigan, the region has long held a special place in the hearts of Michiganders and tourists alike. It is home to the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians, who have centuries of rich history and connectedness with the area. The present community includes vibrant leaders and organizations from public, private, tribal, and nonprofit sectors who strive to make the region sustainable, welcoming, and resilient. The region is a popular tourist destination with key attractions centering around, but not limited to, the annual Cherry Festival, a flourishing wine and beer scene, and beautiful freshwater beaches. These attractions also make the region an appealing place for retirees to spend their summer months, with popular news sources claiming it to be in the top 20 places to retire in the nation.[4] The region continues to experience growth with the main hub, Traverse City, experiencing a population growth of 8.37% since 2010.[5] Many leaders in the region wish to transition away from the current trajectory towards becoming primarily a seasonal tourist destination, to creating a community that can support both tourism and working families year-round.

In 2019, the Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation (GTRCF) mobilized leaders from diverse sectors to form the Community Development Coalition of Northwest Michigan (Coalition), aimed at guiding collaborative and intentional growth for Northwest Michigan. The group's coverage area spans Antrim, Kalkaska, Grand Traverse, Benzie and Leelanau counties, all of which surround the Grand Traverse Bay. The Coalition has crafted a Community Development Scorecard that outlines regional sustainability goals and specific metrics that will track progress across interconnected economic, societal, and environmental objectives. The Coalition aims to facilitate regional collaboration by breaking down the barriers between the different sectors of the triple bottom line, allowing novel opportunities between traditionally disparate organizations. This approach to advancing regional sustainability goals is a direct effort to enhance productivity and inspire innovative problem solving. Additionally, the Coalition does not require a membership scheme, therefore participating organizations and actors are herein referred to as "contributors".

Prior to the Coalition's debut, collaborative efforts in 2005 produced a 50-year master plan for the region called *The Grand Vision*.[6] Although collectively acknowledged within the region as a well-intended initiative, mixed reviews continue to circulate after it failed to gain regional traction and later became known among some of the populace as a mark of inaction. In the face of doubt cast by the Grand Vision, Coalition success hinges on the ability of the group's interdisciplinary contributors to shift from planning to action in a coordinated and intentional way. In addition to this lingering hesitancy surrounding regional planning, the region faces pressing economic and societal issues that cause friction and inhibit regional consensus and unified action.

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[4] Ben Geler. "Best Places to Retire in Michigan". (October 2012). *SmartAsset.* Retrieved from https://smartasset.com/retirement/best-places-to-retire-in-michigan.

[5] "Traverse City, Michigan Population 2021." (2021). *World Population Review.* Retrieved from https://worldpopulationreview.com/us-cities/traverse-city-mi-population.

[6] The Grand Vision. (n.d.). *The Grand Vision.* Retrieved from http://www.thegrandvision.org/.

Meanwhile, the Coalition is working within a regional context that includes deep-rooted challenges related to affordability and accessibility, racial equity, and economic resiliency. Fifteen minutes inland from Lake Michigan, the landscape shifts to rural and agricultural land, with many populations living in poverty. According to the American Community Survey (ACS, 2021), between January 2020 and January 2021, multiple counties in the Grand Traverse region had a significant number of its residents below the Federal poverty line: Antrim at 11.0%, Kalkaska at 16.7%, Grand Traverse at 9.6%, and Benzie at 9.5% (Figure 1). Counties further inland from the Grand Traverse Bay experience higher rates of poverty compared to counties along the coast with greater access to freshwater amenities. This is most apparent when observing Kalkaska, the only landlocked county, with 16.7% of the population under the poverty line; comparatively, Leelanau has the most shoreline and only had 6.1% of residents under the poverty line. Leelanau was also listed as having the most disparate income in Michigan as reported by the Economic Policy Institute in 2018.[7] Northern Michigan communities also struggle to build and maintain diverse populations, with Grand Traverse County receiving only a 16.80 out of 100 on the 2018 diversity index indicating the county is predominately white.[8] Furthermore, some portions of the Grand Traverse region have struggled to accept growing movements to advance racial equity, gaining national attention for a few prominent examples of negative backlash by multiple residents on different occasions.[9]
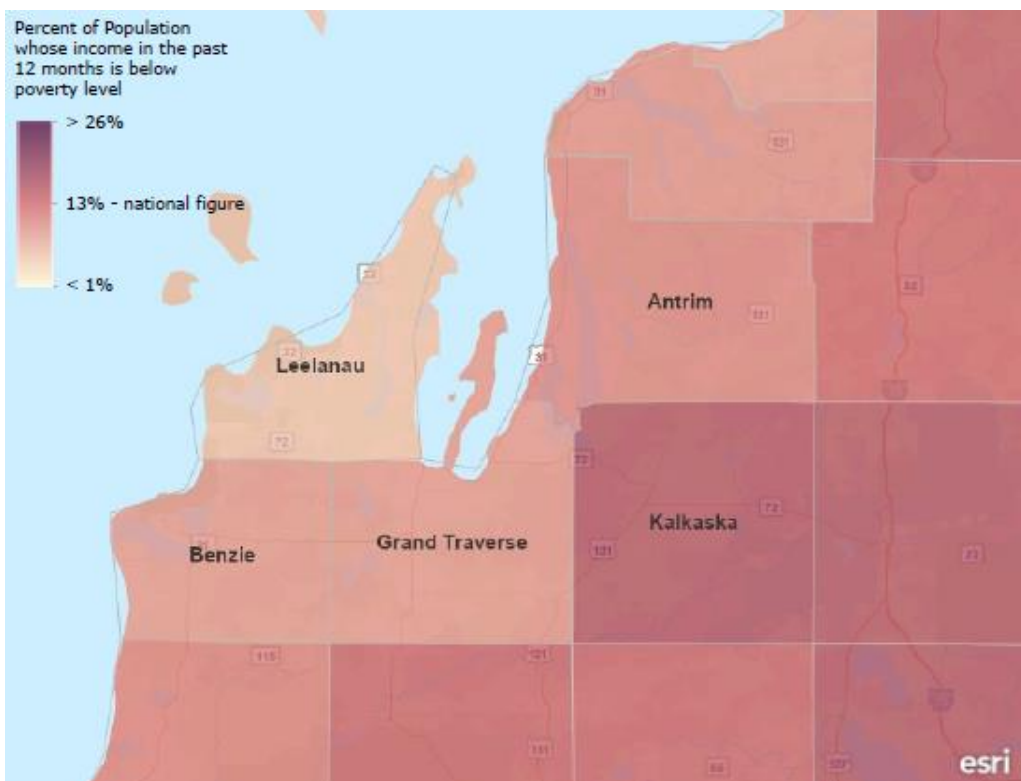

Figure 1. Percent of the population under the poverty line in the past twelve months within each Grand Traverse county covered by the Community Development Coalition (ACS, 2021).

[7] "Income Inequality in Michigan". (n.d.). Retrieved from https://www.epi.org/multimedia/unequal-states-of-america/#/Michigan

[8] Reese-Cassal, Kyle. "2014/2019 Esri Diversity Index". (September, 2014). *Esri White Paper*. Retrieved from https://www.esri.com/content/dam/esrisites/sitecore-archive/Files/Pdfs/library/whitepapers/pdfs/diversity-index-methodology.pdf

[9] Ramirez, Charles E. "Lawsuit seeks sanctions against Mich. county, official who displayed rifle in meeting". (April 2021). *The Detroit News.* Retrieved from https://www.detroitnews.com/story/news/local/michigan/2021/04/12/lawsuit-sanctions-grand-traverse-county-official-rifle-meeting/7187321002/

Project Objectives

The Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation recognizes regional hesitancy towards community visioning and planning, and now seeks to make purposeful change in ways that previous efforts fell short. Furthermore, the group is aware of their influence as a collaboration of regional leaders and is inspired to find new ways to address and positively advance regional affordability, accessibility, and resiliency, as well as social equity and inclusion. To date, the Coalition has gathered a diverse subset of community leaders, published their Community Development Scorecard, and started tracking and sharing associated metrics via a public web platform.

To help the Coalition overcome hesitancies stemming from prior inaction, boost future success, and address regional challenges, we engaged in research aiming to identify key strategies for kick-starting and maintaining action toward regional sustainability initiatives within the Grand Traverse region. We identified three project objectives:

1. **Understand how other Great Lakes coastal communities are approaching similar challenges related to sustainable regional development.**

   We researched and interviewed leaders from Great Lakes coastal communities making progress toward similar sustainability goals to understand key steps to advancing these types of efforts and overcoming barriers. This knowledge will allow the Grand Traverse region to identify effective approaches to sustaining progress towards current and future goals. Using this information, we crafted a series of case studies highlighting similar challenges and opportunities from example communities that can be applied in the context of the Coalition's efforts.

2. **Identify specific opportunities and shortcomings of current community development efforts in the Grand Traverse region.**

   We interviewed local leaders from the Grand Traverse region to identify and assess barriers to, and leverage points for, sustained community action by the Coalition. Our interviewees represented diverse perspectives of both community members and Coalition contributors. These interviews aimed to highlight a range of viewpoints on the Coalition's efforts that allowed us to identify opportunities for action and recognize specific barriers to implementation.

3. **Synthesize our findings into recommendations that can be acted on by the Coalition to ensure long-term progress, while mitigating potential barriers to action.**

   Following regional and local interviews, we analyzed and synthesized findings to recommend robust strategies for long-term progress toward the region's sustainability goals. Recommendations are outlined and organized by priority level and are paired with specific strategies to act on each recommendation.

Methods

Data Collection

Case Studies and Case Study Interviews

Site Selection

Our team identified sites for regional case studies through multiple phases of discovery. We examined Great Lakes One Water (GLOW) Partnership Communities to identify a baseline of exemplary coastal communities.[10] GLOW is a "basin-wide initiative focused on engaging shoreline community foundations as a force multiplier to advance a new era of water management."[11] We then worked with Coalition leadership to determine important community traits and characteristics that would provide the most meaningful and insightful comparisons against the Grand Traverse region. Combining community details with demographic features available from the US Census.[12] Our deliberation resulted in the following site selection criteria:

Coastal Geography - We narrowed our scope to communities or regions near the coast of the Great Lakes. We expected these communities to share strong connections, context, and experiences around water resources, similar to those of the Grand Traverse region.

Scale of Community Operations - We sought communities of a similar geographic scale and character as the Coalition, which represents a strong economic area in a modestly populated urban center that is surrounded by rural communities. This was not intended to be a strict criterion, as each community would inherently have differences.

Population Demographics - We examined whether population demographics of case communities were comparable to those of the Grand Traverse region. Demographic factors examined included population size, average income, racial/ethnic diversity, education level, industry background, basic health characteristics, and available regional resources. As the Grand Traverse region currently lacks some facets of diversity, we also included communities that mirrored a more diverse future which the region is aiming for. We examined the regional population spread as it pertains to the urban-rural divide to best match the characteristics of the Grand Traverse region. The region has a strong and localized urban center surrounded by a vast rural setting with an equal societal emphasis and importance placed on the local city unit and the rural operations in the area by the local population. We also prioritized proximity to, and connection with, regional indigenous communities in the U.S. and First Nations in Canada, although lack of presence or interaction was not a disqualifier.

Access to Local Resources - We considered population size to be loosely analogous to a community's access to resources through the respective tax base. To avoid a drastic comparison with either smaller regions or large metropolitan areas, we kept this tax-based resource limitation in mind. For example, this factor disqualified cities such as Detroit and Chicago from being

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[10] "Great Lakes One Water Partnership." (2018). *Council of Michigan Foundations.* Retrieved from https://web.archive.org/web/20190507075328/https://www.michiganfoundations.org/greatlakesonewater

[11] Young, Deondré. "Great lakes one water partnership: A force multiplier for great lakes impact". (n.d.). *Great Lakes Protection Fund.* Retrieved from http://glpf.org/blog/great-lakes-one-water-partnership-a-force-multiplier-for-great-lakes-impact/

[12] "Traverse City Quickfacts." (July 2019). *United States Census Bureau*

considered due to the overwhelming size difference in relation to our target area. However, we did investigate and include some communities that had slightly larger populations to assess transferable qualities and traits that could be relevant to growth.

Access to Federal Resources - We also considered federal resource access as a consideration for comparison against our target region, but not as a disqualifier. Many communities across the Great Lakes are eligible for federal funding, for example, as a Great Lakes Areas of Concern or Superfund site. We recognized that these resources did not match what is available in our target region, and therefore should be considered special case scenarios.

Community Sustainability Accomplishments - While considering all the above criteria, we searched for communities that exhibited known progress beyond the planning phase of regional sustainability efforts, that directly correlate with the type of action and momentum the Coalition is seeking to accomplish. Our initial list of potential communities was developed from publicly accessible data regarding regional sustainability efforts, assuming that successful communities would share their achievements via a publicly accessible platform.

Next, we vetted and compared the initial list with recommendations provided by a diverse network of Great Lakes experts who represented multiple sectors and communities, and who possessed a high level of insight into regional leadership. We used a snowball method, wherein one of our known regional experts would connect us to one or more experts at a similar or more localized area, producing an expanded network of contacts. This feedback ultimately led us to refine a set of communities exhibiting accomplishments in regional sustainability.

Using the above community characteristics as filters, we selected six final case study communities. Three of the case studies represented a local scale: (1) Duluth and Cloquet, Minnesota, (2) Durham Region and Toronto, Ontario, (3) and the combined binational community of Port Huron, Michigan and Sarnia, Ontario. One case study covered a larger, regional scale spanning seven counties across the central-west coast of lower Michigan radiating out from Grand Haven, MI. The final two case studies were minor profiles of areas that did not perfectly fit our criterion, but represented unique sustainability efforts in the region and included Buffalo, New York and Marquette, Michigan.

Interviewee Selection

For each case study community, we identified influential leaders from multiple sectors who had knowledge of and involvement in local community development and sustainability efforts. This process was a natural extension of the network building mentioned previously and resulted in a robust list of contacts. Interviewees represented corporate sustainability interests; environmental organizations in nonprofit, government, and academic sectors; and government actors at multiple levels from the United States and Canada.

Interview Design

Interviews were designed to gain knowledge of the methods and means used by other communities to kick-start and sustain efforts toward environmental sustainability. As such, we asked several questions across four high level themes. (Appendix A: Interview Questions - Case Studies):

Theme: Vision and Motivation

What constitutes your organizational or regional vision? Who or what motivated this vision?

Our first question was designed to quickly establish a contextual understanding of place, by elaborating on the visioning process for the interviewee's region and organization. We were interested in vision development and who was involved in the efforts to connect the dots between ideology and project implementation. Anticipated topics included personal, organizational, and regional vision which form the baseline for each community's unique context and objectives.

Theme: Implementation Tactics and Strategy

What actions took your vision from idea to reality? What did and did not work?

We explored the factors and strategies that catalyzed project implementation within each community, explicitly focusing on first steps to initiate action. This included identifying funding sources, socioeconomic or community barriers to project implementation, and any tools or resources that played a key role in a successful implementation phase for our case study communities.

Theme: Reporting and Accountability

What efforts of reporting and accountability maintain action and momentum toward your community's goals?

To identify the scale by which each organization delivered information to the public, we assessed reporting and accountability as methods and methodology for tracking progress and sustaining engagement with the local community. We explored barriers to sustainability initiatives as it pertains to ensuring internal accountability and the interviewees' perspectives on community oversight. This included the extent or amount of reporting and informing that each organization shared with the public. We also explored the specific role of the community as it pertains to these projects, including the need for ongoing facilitation of project work, while also examining successful methods for project tracking and reporting as described by the interviewees. Discussions covered the extent of reporting organizational matters to the public, and the specific internal tools, structures, or methods organizations use to track their activities.

Theme: Partnerships and Collaboration

How did partnerships and collaboration help sustain implementation efforts in your region?

We examined relationship building between key players in the case study communities. We aimed to identify collaboration successes and missteps, and highlight specific examples of unique partnerships. Interviewees were asked to identify and highlight successful collaboration strategies and note possible interior and exterior challenges when maintaining long-term engagement between partners. Further, we asked for advice on best practices around incentivizing teamwork for each participating organization.

Interview process

Interviews were led by different members of our research team who were each responsible for, at most, two case study areas. Each team member facilitated all interviews for an assigned geographic area to provide continuity. For each interview, at least one other member provided note taking and interview support and were assigned on a rotating basis to minimize bias.

Interviews were designed to last 45-60 minutes and were entirely conducted using the secure Zoom video conferencing platform to ensure safe interactions during the ongoing COVID-19 epidemic. With interviewee consent, all interviews were recorded and transcribed using Zoom's auto-transcription feature for subsequent review, fact finding, and note checking.

When appropriate, interview questions were further tailored to the background and expertise of the interviewee. This tailoring was slight in nature and represented very specific questions that might not have applied to certain types of interviewees. We did not share questions with interviewees in advance, so as to not interfere with genuine response. However, we did provide a general scope of the interview outline including high level discussion themes.

Grand Traverse Interviews

Participant Selection

Grand Traverse interviews were split into two categories based on affiliation with the Coalition. One group represented Coalition contributors and the other represented community leaders not affiliated with the Coalition. In selecting Coalition-affiliated participants, we identified eleven interviewees of the initial 30 contributors who were participating at the time of our research. Through our selection, we also attempted to represent the distinct areas of expertise and diverse viewpoints present in the group.

In selecting interviewees not affiliated with the Coalition, we leveraged existing contacts to reach an expanded network of regional leaders. After summarizing and evaluating the relevant experiences of the potential candidates, we selected seventeen interviewees across multiple sectors and backgrounds that we believed captured a diverse perspective around regional sustainability.

Interview Design

Interview questions for Coalition contributors and other community leaders were slightly modified from the thematic and open-ended questions used in the case study interviews. We used lessons learned from the case studies themselves and again outlined our questions to follow the 'lifeline' of a project or initiative from inception to results. To refine data gathering that was directly relevant to the Coalition, we added questions asking about an interviewee's role in the Coalition or region, and about their knowledge of Coalition efforts (where applicable). Similar to case study interviews, we asked interview questions as organized by theme (Appendix B: Interview Questions - Coalition Contributors) and (Appendix C: Interview Questions - Grand Traverse Community):

What is your vision for your organization and the Grand Traverse region? If applicable, what is your vision for the Coalition?

We asked interviewees about their visions for the various organizational and regional structures they were a part of. These questions allowed us to quickly identify context at a personal, organizational, and regional level. We explicitly asked Coalition contributors about their vision for the organization to draw out different perspectives that existed. Further, we inquired about how equity and sustainability were represented at different scales (i.e., personal, organizational, and regional).

Theme: Implementation Strategies and Tactics

What actions are necessary to transition from vision to reality and make change in the Grand Traverse region?

We asked Coalition interviewees to outline potential pathways that would lead the Coalition from planning to implementation, including their perspective on the roles individual contributors could fulfill to ensure progress. Questions were intended to identify strengths of Coalition efforts and potential barriers that could impede Coalition progress. We also discussed prioritization of Coalition objectives and scorecard metrics.

We asked other community leaders to outline their personal or organizational methods of transitioning from planning to action. This was to broaden the scope of recommendations we could ultimately deliver to the Coalition, and to elaborate on potential avenues of success Coalition leadership might have missed in their planning phase.

Theme: Reporting and Accountability

What actions will maintain, or help maintain, action and momentum towards local objectives?

We asked Coalition interviewees to describe their preferences related to communication and reporting, both internally and publicly. Further, we specifically posed questions aimed at unpacking views on organizational accountability within the Coalition, and how organizations could effectively represent those within their respective networks. We directly asked Coalition interviewees what conditions would make the Coalition a worthwhile investment of time and money for their organization.

We asked other community leaders to describe their preferred methods of communicating with the public and how they expected to receive communication from other organizations and agencies conducting work in their region.

We asked all interviewees about their perspectives on the previous major planning efforts within the region, specifically the Grand Vision and Vision 2020.

<u>Theme: Partnerships and Collaboration</u>

How will partnerships and collaboration sustain implementation efforts in the region?

Coalition contributors were asked to explain the ideal process for relationship building across sectors and specifically how their organization could use Coalition relationships to simultaneously advance their organization's mission. We asked interviewees about the intersection of collaborations between government entities, local tribes, non-profit organizations, and for-profit organizations. We also attempted to identify if further expansion of the group should occur, and if so, to elaborate on individuals, groups, or organizations that should be invited to the Coalition.

We asked interviewees to elaborate on their organization's efforts to achieve collaborative goals within their area of influence, how they built existing partnerships, and whether there were missing partnerships that would enhance their capacities or wider regional efforts.

Interview Process

Each interview was led by a single member of the research team. They were structured by thematic questions originally derived for the case studies and augmented by the more specific question set noted above. Similar to the case study interviews, these interviews were held online via the Zoom video conferencing platform and were roughly 45-60 minutes long. One member of the research team facilitated the interview, while at least one other took notes. With the consent of the interviewee, interviews were recorded using the Zoom platform for transcription and internal analyses.

Each interviewee was selected for their background and expertise and thus questions were tailored slightly to accommodate unique perspectives. Questions that were tailored represented very specific questions that might not have applied to certain interviewees. We did not share interview questions in advance so as not to interfere with a genuine response. However, we did provide a general scope of the interview outline and question themes.

Data Analysis

Case Study Interviews

Interview Processing and Analysis

Using our interview recordings and notes, we summarized key themes within each case study community or region and across all study areas to produce a series of one-page case studies. Each researcher was responsible for analyzing the case study regions they led in the interview process. We used these observations to outline narrative-based strengths as supporting information or evidence for the Coalition's strategic directions and future operations.

Grand Traverse Interviews

Interview Processing: Preparing Interview Outputs for Analysis

We processed the raw video of each interview using the automatic transcription services within the online suite of Microsoft Office. The online suite allowed for automatic identification of speakers in the output transcript, which were reviewed for accuracy. We performed a manual review of each transcript by reading the output text alongside the raw video and made corrections to the transcript where necessary. Each video was reviewed twice, once by the original interviewer and a second time by a team member to provide an additional round of quality analysis and quality control. Within the second round of quality control, the dedicated team member formatted the transcripts into a question-and-answer layout. We removed time codes and standardized such variables as header size, text font, and topic bolding. Interviewer conversational input was sanitized to minimize any impact on automated analysis with qualitative data analysis software. We did this by manually summarizing and standardizing all questions asked by the interviewer across all interviews, so as to present a consistency across delivered questions.

Interview Coding: Identifying Themes Through Computer Analysis

We imported finalized and formatted transcripts directly into NVivo 12 qualitative data analysis software. Prior to coding, we established a running list of initial key themes and subthemes identified by direct observation from our interviews, which we describe as our "codebook." Key themes were represented as "nodes" and "sub-nodes" within the analysis software and will be hereinafter referred to as such. The initial nodes were expanded and refined over time after team discussion and subsequent review. (Appendix D: Code Definitions)

Next, we coded our results as a way to complete both qualitative and quantitative analysis of our interview findings. In our first round of coding, we ran multiple functions using NVIVO's automated coder to produce multiple analytical outputs without requiring human input. These were word frequency and density charts that allowed us to identify key themes for mode identification, beyond those from our initial observation, and to produce simple visual aids to assist in analytical processes and product design.

In our second round of coding, processes were entirely manual. We carefully examined every question-and-answer segment of each interview for important pieces of information and assigned a node to all relevant phrases or sentences within each transcript. Each coding assignment was then reviewed by a randomized team member.

Coalition Feedback Session

Upon completing our first round of coding, we presented initial findings in a one-hour, interactive feedback session to 12 Coalition contributors. The purpose of the session was to outline and explain the high-level themes that were most heavily referenced amongst Coalition interviewees, while gaining an understanding of whether the goals and trajectory of the various contributors were aligned. This served to verify the data gathered and was not an attempt to gather new information. Prior to the session, we shared a pre-meeting questionnaire that acted as an individual activity to prioritize key themes from our initial coding. During the session, we engaged in several exercises that allowed Coalition contributors to share their individual results of the pre-meeting activity and collaboratively weigh priorities in both small groups and as a collective.

These activities allowed us to compare data between our initial interviewees and a broader group of Coalition contributors. The session was facilitated and supported by Coalition leadership and open to all Coalition contributors, regardless of whether they had been interviewed previously. (Appendix E: Coalition Feedback Session Pre-Meeting Materials)

Interview Analysis and Categorization of Primary Themes

After coding, we each analyzed a subset of nodes to extrapolate all major themes. This process involved analyzing a total of 2,637 references, each representing individual phrases, sentences, or paragraphs that were categorized within a specific node or sub-node. We manually summarized themes from each interviewee and characterized higher level themes across each node. We then compiled key considerations within each theme and categorized each, using a SWOT analysis framework: Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, or Threat.[13] After completing the SWOT analysis, we applied our findings in a Threat, Opportunity, Weakness, and Strength (TOWS) matrix which identifies mechanisms to strategically leverage or mitigate each SWOT category. Specifically, strengths are leveraged to maximize opportunities and minimize threats, whereas weaknesses are minimized by leveraging opportunities and avoiding threats.[14] We used the TOWS framework to inform recommendations and strategies for the Coalition moving forward.

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[13] "SWOT Analysis." (n.d.). Mind Tools. Retrieved from https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newTMC_05.htm.

[14] "Using the TOWS Matrix". (n.d.). *Mind Tools.* https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newSTR_89.htm.

Results

Regional Case Studies

Each Great Lakes coastal community we studied provided strategic approaches to help the Coalition find and maintain success (Table 1). Takeaways included both personal and organization achievements, and lessons learned through experience. The following case studies guided the scope and design of our local interviews in the Grand Traverse region.

Buffalo, NY

Our interviewee highlighted the importance of slow and consistent growth in building a locally empowered and sustainable movement. She stressed that the power for change is rooted firmly within the community, and that it is the job of community facing organizations to facilitate local efforts into positive impact. This facilitation can only be done after garnering initial support and credibility, which should be sought through identifying, targeting, and completing smaller-scale projects, often defined as "low-hanging fruit" or "easy wins." She also noted that as organizational momentum builds, it is essential to maintain and manage organizational and inter-organizational relationships in a positive and constructive way – allowing disagreements to play out naturally in the group context provided they do not genuinely interfere with collaboration efforts. In reference to funding, our interviewee believed that funding should never be thought of as a single transaction, but more so as leverage for additional, future funds. She further stated that funding should be treated as an essential puzzle piece towards the next projects on the horizon to maintain consistent momentum.

Duluth and Cloquet, MN

Our interviewees placed a strong emphasis on ascertaining community backing and support as a key requirement for success. In this, the primary role of project facilitation by community facing organizations was to identify practical metrics that resonate with the local populace, to draw out and leverage the fundamental forces of social change and progress. These community derived metrics would also enable locals to be motivated and recognize their own input into related efforts, which subsequently drives project engagement. As an extension of this process, one of our interviewees noted that it was possible to develop a metric to track community engagement (e.g., amount of people contacted, number of website views, social media hashtags) and establish specific metrics for sustainable community engagement through measurement of project engagement. Further, community engagement metrics can encourage community facing organizations to engage directly and honestly with those they serve. In presenting these and any other metrics, our interviewees believed that providing a narrative with the data is significantly more important than simply presenting raw facts. Specifically, raw data can often lead to misinterpretation, and it should be the organization's priority to represent their efforts in an engaging and truthful way.

Marquette, MI

Our interviewee emphasized the importance of placing tribal relations at the forefront of every conversation to build a system where they are never considered an afterthought. He also noted that relying on and trusting in local organizations is essential to fulfilling local needs. These local groups are significantly more capable of making progress than any outsider organization that holds little contextual knowledge. He also expressed that the expertise of the tribes, local organizations, and regional experts are invaluable. Our interviewee stated that organizational credibility and traction is built through small victories, and that more time should be spent on streamlining implementation processes instead of extensive planning. Lastly, our interviewee found that accessible writing and engaging narrative is critical in garnering public support and momentum.

Port Huron, MI and Sarnia, ON, Canada

Our interviewees emphasized the importance of the public playing a central role in successfully identifying and solving community concerns and issues. They stressed the value of having multiple collaborators as a method of risk reduction. Additionally, resource sharing is an important benefit of collaboration among regional community facing organizations. Our interviewees noted that a smaller collective of organizations with adaptive management structures can be more agile in addressing project concerns, and that there will be declines in project maneuverability as groups grow too large. Further, one interviewee noted that as collective action expands, it is important to have a robust monitoring system for project accountability, and to follow through by empowering one or more of the partner organizations to conduct said monitoring. Lastly, one interviewee noted the importance of democratizing modern philanthropy by providing avenues for all community members to participate and give (e.g., encouraging donations in the $1-100 range). Furthermore, it is critical that society move past the modern philanthropic principles founded prior to World War II, which do not adequately represent the racial and cultural diversities that exist today.

Toronto and Durham, ON, Canada

Our interviewees noted that creating a local vision around a common thread as the first step to collaborative success. This common thread (e.g., the environment) can be used to bring group members together in times of conflict and reunite efforts around pre-existing values. After establishing a common thread, the community facing organization or group can begin work on easy, community involved projects, to establish credibility and build momentum. While the easy projects are in progress, the organization can plan and work on bigger, slower moving projects behind the scenes. The easier projects, or "low-hanging-fruit," can maintain public momentum until larger projects are ready to be unveiled. One interviewee noted that, when it comes to planning out longer-range projects, it is imperative to keep the scale of planning limited to the capabilities of the organizers, as over-planning or establishing unrealistic goals can result in loss of interest by participating organizations. In terms of public engagement, one interviewee noted that providing multiple avenues of volunteering allows the public to scale their level of assistance to what they can commit to. Additionally, there is a minimum level of community engagement often underestimated when establishing needs and standards for commitment (e.g., money or time). Both interviewees also stressed the importance of data sharing through narrative and visual means, such as mapping, to express relatable information to the public while avoiding

information overload or fatigue. That said, one of the interviewees noted that providing open-source data is quite popular in today's world and that many individual citizens should be allowed to make their own inferences.

Western-Central Lower Peninsula, Michigan

Our interviewees emphasized that clear work plans were essential to achieving bold and sustainable visions for a community, and these were best pursued through deliberate and incremental steps. Successful implementation of these plans in the region included a dynamic learning approach with frequent reevaluation of initial goals and plans. Our interviewees maintained the interest and investment of partnering organizations by establishing clear expectations around partner roles and outlining what they aimed to accomplish throughout the course of their partnership. In addition to implementation, our interviewees made every effort to sustainably leverage the social and economic values of their local water resources to become a strong foundation for their local economy. The interviewees noted that there was a strong connection to the local water features in the area (i.e., the Grand River) that acted as a unifying force across communities in the region. This unifier allowed for local community facing organizations to implement and engage with robust efforts across a larger geographic span both within and without the region's central metropolitan hub. Interviewees also remarked on the benefit of having equity champions who can reinvent collaborative decision-making frameworks that address racial disparities, lacking representation, social equity, and a need for justice. Further, certain interviewees noted a new focus on reframing traditional white-environmentalist narratives to instead highlight sustainability stories and solutions led by underrepresented groups who continue to play a vital role as leaders in the environmental and sustainability movements

Table 1. Key takeaways from case studies.

Location	Organizations	Key Highlights
Buffalo, New York	*Buffalo Niagara Waterkeeper*	● Credibility is established through early wins. ● It is not necessary to change the world, just change the community you value. ● Expand the table and respect all members of your community.
Duluth and Cloquet, Minnesota	*City of Duluth, Fond du Lac Band of Lake Superior Chippewa*	● Community support and backing is essential to the success of any project. ● Metrics must be practical, relevant, and realistic to keep the public engaged. ● Plan where and when you can, then be prepared to act on that plan at any time. ● Trust takes time to build, frustration with the process implies you are doing the right thing.
Marquette, Michigan	*Lake Superior Watershed Partnership and Land Conservancy*	● Tribes must be at the forefront for progress; welcome their opinion and offer assistance. ● Believe in local organizations; reaching out to help them may be the fastest way to get a project done. ● Show positive results as quickly as possible to establish credibility.
Port Huron, Michigan - Sarnia, Ontario, Canada	*Binational Public Advisory Council, Michigan Environment, Great Lakes & Energy, St. Clair River Area of Concern, Community Foundation of St. Clair County*	● The role of a Community Foundation is to foster and coordinate relationships, and to ensure that the right people are talking to each other. ● Long-term success is built on consistency. ● Public involvement is the key to addressing community concerns. ● Diversity, equity, and inclusion must always be front of mind.
Toronto and Durham, Ontario, Canada	*Lake Ontario Waterkeeper, Toronto Region Conservation Authority*	● Unify around a common thread and vision. ● Use storytelling and visuals to convey data. ● Provide alternate avenues for community support that offer varying levels of participation. ● Garner support through completing small projects while keeping larger projects moving behind the scenes.
Western-Central Lower Peninsula, Michigan	*Grand Valley State University, Frey Foundation, Ottawa County, Nichols, Grand Valley Metropolitan Council, Grand Rapids Community Collaboration on Climate Change*	● Make progress toward big visions through incrementalism and by being dynamic. ● Manage expectations with intentional planning and clear goals of partnerships. ● Establish clear and intentional approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion. ● Showcase sustainability efforts in non-traditional ways (e.g., storytelling). ● Highlight the economic value and connectivity of water to link communities.

Grand Traverse Interviews

Coding Themes Identified from Grand Traverse Interviews

Grand Traverse interviewees shared thorough and thoughtful personal perspectives on the region, providing us with insight into local sentiments surrounding the interconnected economic, ecologic, and societal aspects of the community. The most discussed nodes included vision with 14.6% coverage and 370 references, partnerships and collaboration with 14.5% coverage and 369 references, coalition structure and process with 12.9% coverage and 326 references, and communication with 11.0% coverage and 279 references (Figure 2). Several topics were talked about by every single interviewee: strategies, communication, partnerships and collaboration, and strengths and opportunities. In analyzing sub-nodes independently, topics related to partnership and collaboration were discussed most with 11.8% coverage and 300 references brought up by all of our interviewees. This was followed by weaknesses and threats with 6.7% coverage, 169 references, and discussed by all but two interviewees. Less frequent topics, when analyzing combined nodes, included priorities with 3.7% coverage and 94 references, planning with 4.1% coverage and 105 references, and diversity, equity, and inclusion, (DEI) with 4.4% coverage and 111 references. The sub-nodes discussed the least were legal with 0.3% coverage, lacking resources with 1.0% coverage, and community priorities with 1.6% coverage.
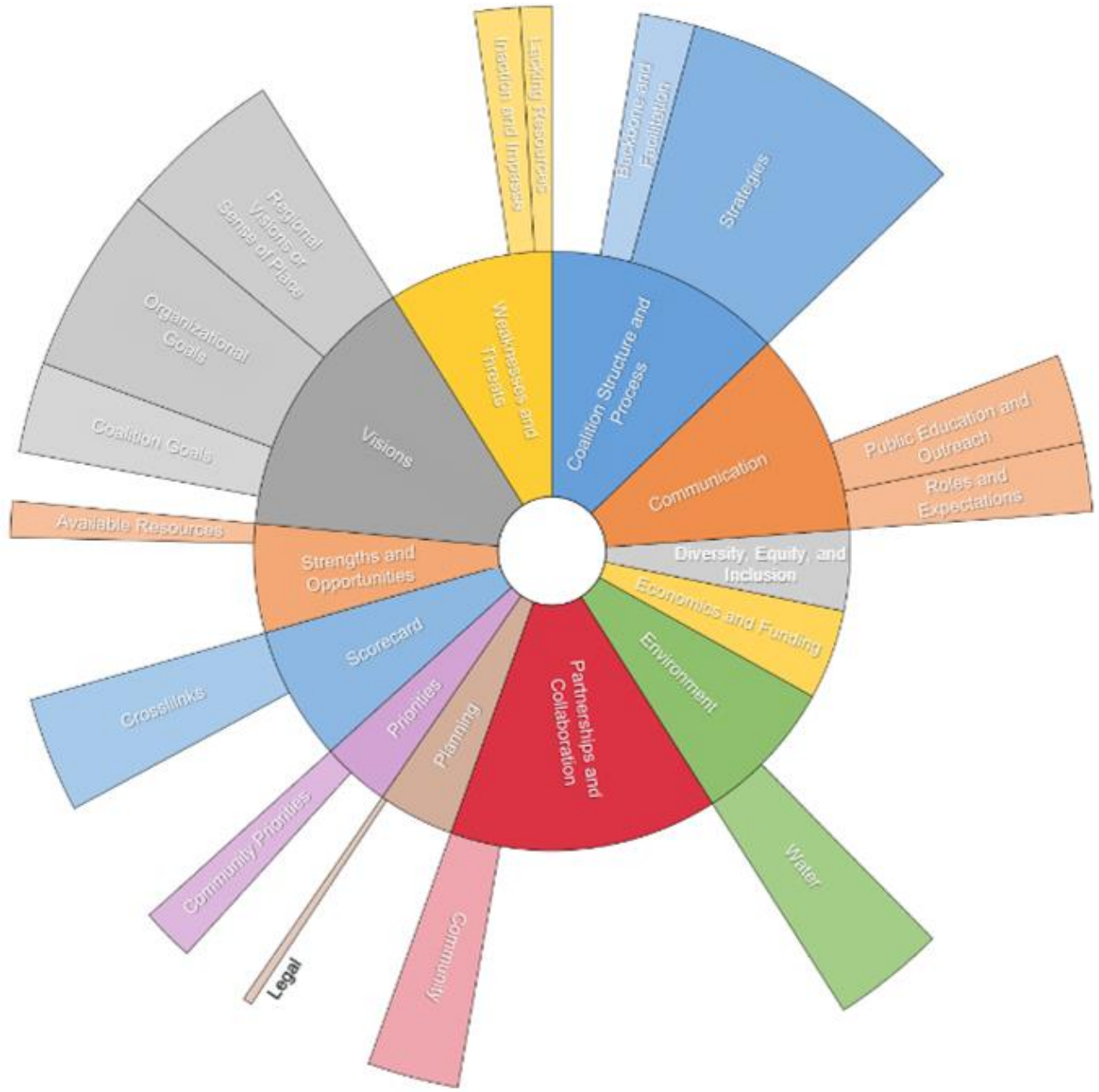
Figure 2. Hierarchical chart representing relative percent coverage between all nodes and sub-nodes. The large, central slices represent total percent coverage of both the node and sub-nodes, while the smaller slices are only the sub-node percent cover.

Coalition Feedback Session

We hosted a Coalition Feedback session to determine if key themes identified during our first-round of analysis were on track with the Coalition's overall goals and objectives. Prior to the feedback session, we asked participants to rank the five initial themes, derived from the first round of analysis, on a scale of 1 (least important) to 5 (most important). Responses were averaged across participants (N = 12) to visualize an overall ranking of priorities (Figure 3). Based on these rankings, we found that Partnerships and Collaboration, Goals and Visions, and Strategy and Structure all ranked similarly and fairly high, while Scorecard and Communication and Public Education ranked lower.

During the feedback session, we asked participants to rank the same themes within strategically assigned small groups to determine consensus on a collective prioritization (N = 12) (Table 2). We assigned coalition contributors to Groups 1 through 3 and the Coalition's leadership team to Group 4 to assess differences. All groups identified Partnerships and Collaboration and Strategy and Structure as top priorities, with Goals and Vision ranking from high to medium priority. The Coalition Contributors placed less emphasis on the Scorecard and Public Communication while prioritizing themes in their break-out groups and during the open discussion. Conversely, leadership in Group 4 ranked Communication as one of their top priorities.
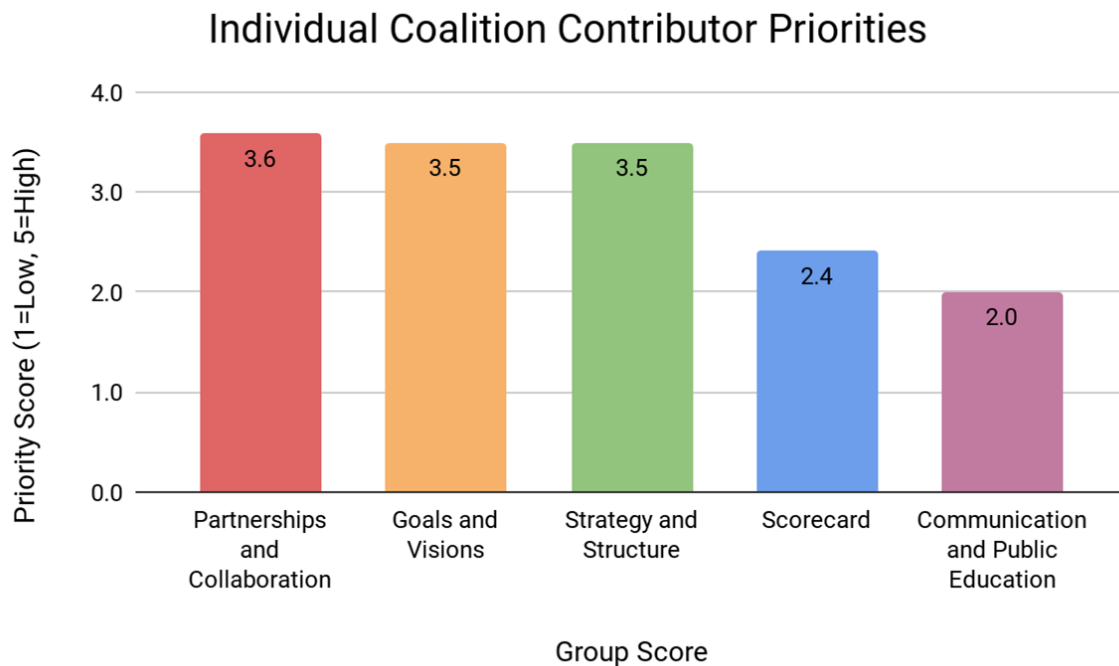

Figure 3. Coalition contributor feedback session results to the questionnaire that was sent out prior to the session.

Table 2. Feedback session prioritizations from the three contributor groups (1-3) and one facilitator group (4).

GROUP 1	GROUP 2	GROUP 3	GROUP 4	RANKING
Strategy	Collaboration	Strategy	Collaboration	High Priority
Collaboration	Strategy	Goals/Visions	Communication	
Goals/Visions	Scorecard	Collaboration	Strategy	↑
Scorecard	Goals/Visions	Communication	Goals/Visions	
Communication	Communication	Scorecard	Scorecard	Low Priority

Results from the feedback session revealed partnership and collaboration as a top theme and priority, with additional highlighted importance around strategy and structure, and vision. The feedback session revealed the scorecard, as well as communication, to be a lower priority to the group.

Analysis of Coalition Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT)

Using a Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats Analysis, also referred to as SWOT analysis, we identified and organized key interview findings from our conversations with Grand Traverse community leaders and Coalition contributors. The interviews gave us valuable insight that could help or hinder Coalition performance. Reflecting the SWOT model, each key finding was categorized as either a strength, weakness, opportunity, or threat to Coalition performance (Table 3).

Strengths

Strengths represent what the Coalition is doing well, the resources they can leverage, and what regional assets they have access to.

Grand Traverse community interviewees shared their passion for the region by highlighting positive changes they wish to make through their own organizations, their hopes for the Coalition's future, and their robust visions for the region as a whole. This energy for the region was often paired with pride for local environmental resources and/or excitement to collaborate with local leaders from a diverse range of disciplines.

The current meeting structure of the Coalition was reported to be effective, with contributors expressing their trust in Coalition leadership as strong and neutral facilitators. The Grand Traverse region is home to many philanthropic, large non-profit groups providing funding opportunities. In addition to funding, certain local organizations were reportedly effective at collecting local data.

Weaknesses

Weaknesses are areas where the Coalition can improve and where resources are lacking.

Some interviewees felt unclear about the Coalition's unifying vision. Several interviewees felt that indigenous representation and communication are lacking, with some recognizing that late efforts to recognize tribes can often be seen as disingenuous. Some expressed a desire to have a more direct regional approach to anti-racism and equity, starting with leaning into tough conversations. Additional weaknesses were nested in conflicting views across the group as to whether or not the Coalition should add new contributors. Some interviewees stated that they were disappointed in seeing the usual suspects, which contrasted statements from other interviewees who showed surprise for how many new faces they saw in the group. Among current contributors, there were conflicting views over whether the group needs to prioritize an objective based approach or to instead rebuild collaborative frameworks and decision-making processes.

Contributors expressed a desire for more structure around data collection, metric tracking, and Scorecard development. There were also similar concerns related to long term data gathering, uncertainty around intended data users, and a need to establish relevance and urgency for a broader audience to care about collected metrics. Some interviewees expressed conflicting views around the validity and feasibility of scorecard metrics, questioning if the Coalition would be able to accomplish everything they tracked via the Scorecard.

Opportunities

Opportunities represent contextual positions that could offer the Coalition success if acknowledged and acted upon to develop the region and community into a more sustainable, inclusive, and vibrant community.

Interviewees expressed excitement for partnerships that could supplement weaknesses and allow for participants to pool resources. One interviewee noted a unique opportunity for the Coalition to be truly visionary and develop a new model of collaboration that transforms the way sectors and disciplines work together. There is a desire to identify a common thread between organizations and build a shared vision together. Interviewees are excited to develop new and innovative ways to work together, with an open mind to making new mistakes, refining methods, and re-evaluating existing processes. As the Coalition makes progress, interviewees expressed the importance of celebrating incremental wins to maintain momentum. This remained true across both the Coalition and the community.

Interviewees identified opportunities for enhanced regional outreach, engagement, and public education around Coalition efforts. Several of our interviewees were passionate about addressing underrepresented communities, noting environmental justice as a ripe area for movement that has yet to be touched on by the Coalition. Inclusivity and innovative collaborative frameworks were brought up as appealing improvements to the region and were recognized as attractive elements for potential funders. Some interviewees viewed the Coalition as a prime opportunity for environmental organizations to partner with the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians where they can learn from the rich knowledge and expertise of tribal leaders.

Interviewees noted that several groups are gathering regional data that can be used to inform future decision making, potentially in tandem with already identified metrics and cross-links.

Many interviewees valued data-driven decision making, in addition to finding novel ways to leverage data as the Coalition makes progress on their goals. There was also a large emphasis on crafting narratives to boost data communication and inspire action from a broader audience.

Threats

Threats represent fears, worries, doubts, or concerns that could hinder growth and development of the Coalition and region.[15] While threats are not as obvious as weaknesses, they can fester and grow into weaknesses over time.

Coalition interviewees expressed concerns around expectation management, citing that roles, responsibilities, decision making structures, and lines of authority within the group must be more clearly defined. Interviewees further commented on an uncertainty related to accountability and follow-through. For collaboration and trust-building to be successful, interviewees noted a need for further clarity around information sharing processes, Coalition goals, and internal funding mechanisms. There were also mentions of potential mechanisms for compensating Coalition contributors for their time and contributions which spanned varying levels. Contrastingly, others expressed counterpoints indicating a preference for contributors to also have a form of demonstrated commitment and stake in Coalition outcomes.

Interviewees noted regional wealth disparities and polarization as a challenge to accomplishing work that impacts a range of lifestyle and socioeconomic standings. Many interviewees expressed concerns related to several negative events that had occurred locally, and received national attention, which highlighted a lack of racial diversity and cultural understanding within the region. Local boards and groups were reported by some interviewees as "pay-to-play", or representative of a non-inclusive culture that inhibits participation by those with limited financial resources, including direct stakeholders or those directly influenced by group actions. Others shared concerns that some donor-advised funding has reflected a non-inclusive framework by limiting how funds could be spent.

An additional concern includes the continual strain incurred by the COVID-19 pandemic on the region's economy and livelihood, which relies heavily on the hard-hit hospitality and tourism industries.

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[15] Broughton, Robert. "The SWOT Model" (n.d.). *Quality Assurance Solutions*. Retrieved from https://www.quality-assurance-solutions.com/SWOT-Model.html#:~:text=The%20SWOT%20Model%20is%20a%20powerful%20tool%20used,Use%20the%20SWOT%20model%20to%20manage%20brainstorming%20sessions.

Table 3. Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats to Coalition efforts.

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
- Pride in regional identity and local environmental resources - Vast knowledge and expertise within tribal communities - Highly familiar with and skilled at generating a vision and ideas - Extremely motivated and eager to start acting and implementing - Energy for new and exciting work in the region - Backed by innovative leaders with excitement for new solutions - Commitment to collaboration and cross linkages - Representative of a diversity of sectors and disciplines - Leverage community data to measure and track progress - Exhibited trust and neutrality in existing leadership - Highly philanthropic community to support efforts	- Uncertainty around the unifying vision or element - Contrasting preferences toward process building vs. advancing projects - Differing views on expanding vs. capping contributors - Missing tribal representation, input, and influence - Lacking direct, regional approach to anti-racism and equity - Wanting more out of data applications and feasibility assurance - Unsolidified framework on how to prioritize objectives - Resources lack within specific contributor organizations - Disconnect between downtown TC and surrounding rural areas
OPPORTUNITIES	**THREATS**
- New partnerships to unlock shared info, resources, and tools - Lead truly visionary work and take on new and exciting mistakes - Establish new structures around collaborative decision making - Elevate core goals and interests of contributing organizations - Learn from tribal leadership and expertise - Shared voice can be a powerful, positive influence on the region - Contributing organizations can engage with respective networks - Communicate efforts and show change through storytelling - New efforts provide a chance to build a good reputation - Leverage data to inform sound decision making - Remain open to refinement and re-evaluation - Influencing local ordinances as an impactful action - Act on the environmental justice movement - Connect and elevate voices of underrepresented communities - Untapped potential for broader community engagement - Develop Coalition value from acting on cross-links	**Internal** - Unclarity around roles and accountability frameworks - Lacking clear structures and expectations for data / info sharing - Need to be more direct about funding realities and expectations - Warned of donor advised funding as being potentially restrictive - Lacking group consensus and clarity around vision and goals - Contributor commitment is in jeopardy (e.g., busy schedules) - Need solid backing from government and organizations with authority - Lingering doubts around action and implementation (i.e., Grand Vision) - Lacking communication around benefits of participation - Finding a balance between compensation vs. contribution - Broad, change-based work can be a heavy lift and mentally taxing - Pandemic is straining local economy and leading to 'survival' mode **External** - Overall regional and national polarization - Regional conflicts related to diversity, equity, and inclusion - Push-pull between regional traditions and incoming culture shift - Seasonal residents present unique challenges to development - Protections for natural environment are critical for sustaining eco-tourism - Local governments are heavily siloed

Discussion

Themes from Great Lakes Case Studies

While some organizations believe they can trailblaze project efforts without community support, a nearly universal message present across our case studies was that community support and involvement is a primary factor in project sustainability and success. This was highlighted extensively by our interviewees as the need for organizational credibility being the steppingstone required to consistently act upon sustainability efforts. There was little debate around the best way to gain an initial level of credibility from the public. Several organizations laid out their initial objectives as easier and simpler projects, with low barriers to entry, known as "low hanging fruit" or "easy wins". As such, a common thread across the case studies was to incrementally advance small-scale projects that require lesser amounts of funding, while using these small projects to consistently garner public support and goodwill. Behind the scenes, the organization can plan for major organizational objectives that are more impactful and usually more resource intensive.

However, this public support will not necessarily build itself solely as the result of a finished project. Organizations must also communicate success through community outreach through effective storytelling and creative uses of data presentation. While our case study interviewees had differing opinions on the extent of data that should be shared, there is a clear advantage in pairing narrative with raw data. Pairing the two communicates a message that is easy to follow and minimizes the potential for the public to misunderstand complex datasets. Depending on the extent an organization wishes to share its data, framing devices, such as maps or storyboards, can also play a role in effective message delivery.

Project planning approaches varied greatly by organization and interviewee, but at a minimum, having the prerequisite plans ready to implement when funding becomes available arose as best practice throughout the case studies. This variance is partly explained by organizational preference for acquiring funds. One example of this was to conduct 'survival' operations at regular intervals, wherein an organization would implement their project plans until reaching a certain low-fund threshold and then transition to money-making efforts to survive. Another interviewee instead favored sequestering funds into future actions by budgeting for the downtime between projects as best as possible.

Several of our case study communities made it apparent that intentional efforts to advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) were of utmost importance to their community. These activities and efforts represent both specific local community issues with hopes of becoming a positive example on a national level. Active DEI approaches require active engagement with the community which must be front of mind, especially for community facing organizations.

Themes from Grand Traverse Interviews & Coding

There was considerable overlap between nodes discussed by community members and Coalition contributors, indicating that, to a certain degree, Coalition interviewees and community interviewees shared similar values and perspectives. Regional actors were passionate about finding ways to work together, which was highlighted by the fact that every interviewee talked about partnerships and collaboration. All interviewees were thinking purposefully about the future

of the region, and all discussed topics related to Coalition strategies, communication, and strengths and opportunities.

Worries for the region were also apparent, with 15 out of 17 interviewees talking about weaknesses and threats. However, the identified weaknesses and threats were not all necessarily indicative of Coalition efforts, as many were expressions of broader concerns for the region's future. Additionally, many threats could easily be leveraged into opportunities to improve current efforts and the state of the region.

Several topics arose that were not anticipated, and as such, they represent smaller proportions of our results. Of these, the least discussed sub-nodes were legal, community priorities, and lacking resources.

Despite 15 out of 17 interviewees responding to our direct queries, engagement with the topic of DEI was low. Most interviewees acknowledged DEI as important and necessary, but many did not follow up with additional perspectives. That said, some were more passionate about the topic and brought it up on their own along with discussions on how to address underserved communities, improve inclusivity, and be drivers of progress for the community.

Themes from Coalition Feedback Session

The Coalition is still relatively new in the region, so it is vital for the group to become united around common goals and visions. Collecting group perspectives allowed us to determine if the Coalition felt unified in their approach around a collective vision and if this approach aligned with our initial coding results from individual interviews. When asked to collaboratively prioritize initial themes, all four groups ranked the themes of collaboration and strategy within the top two categories, which aligned well with our interview findings. This alignment also illustrated that collaboration and strategy are two critical components of the Coalition's future success. Additionally, the group theme rankings revealed that goals/vision were also an important theme, and highlighted how many Contributors felt similarly about the topics presented. This result emphasized that contributors believe that a unifying vision and shared understanding is important for achieving Coalition and regional success.

Without collaboration and a shared vision, the Coalition's efforts will only benefit specific groups and organizations involved. Facilitating conversations between contributors will build understanding between different disciplines, further establishing the Coalition's common goal, and keeping contributors engaged with the larger group (Kania and Kramer, 2011). This could explain why there was a slight difference in prioritization between the breakout groups and the leadership group. Having all the contributors explain their rationale for their ranking helped align thinking across both the contributors and leadership.

Contributors also noted that some of the themes were strongly correlated. Specifically, as one theme advances the others would follow. Therefore, while some themes ranked lower, it does not necessarily mean they are unimportant, but rather not as immediately critical as other themes.

Themes from Coalition SWOT Analysis

Strengths of Coalition Efforts

The strengths identified by our interviewees anchor the SWOT analysis and highlight aspects of the Coalition that should continue to be nurtured as efforts progress. Because the Coalition leads with their strengths, these were rather straightforward and easy to identify. We understand these strengths to be positive realities communicated by local interviewees and believe they are reflective of the broader vision the Coalition hopes to advance.

Many interviewees discussed the concept of leveraging unique cross-linkages that occur from gathering a diverse group of contributors. Cross-disciplinary connections fuel the Coalition's efforts and must be nurtured as a fundamental guideline of the group moving forward. Interviewees broadly noted this concept as a way for partners to collaborate in non-traditional ways across different sectors and disciplines. For example, energy partners could work with water partners to problem solve around the energy-water nexus, or nonprofits could work with local governments to collaboratively apply for funding.

As a coastal community, it also became clear that the environment, and specifically water resources, acted as a common interest amongst partners in the region. Nearly every interviewee mentioned water in some form, showing that local water resources strongly contribute to the identity of these coastal residents. While interviewees valued water resources, this value represented itself in indifferent ways. Specifically, some focused on the utility and economic value of water, while others talked about the cultural value and benefits of water stewardship and protection. Bringing these values together and unifying around a shared water identity to accomplish a common goal is a powerful mechanism to motivate diverse contributors to find common ground in disagreements (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017).

Areas for Coalition Improvement

Similar to strengths, weaknesses also stood as realities faced by the region, but with a negative connotation. However, when approached from a positive perspective, each weakness presents the Coalition with an opportunity for improvement. We found that some of the noted weaknesses stemmed from a lack of two-way communication or engagement with some of the contributors, which led to uncertainty. For example, those who are highly involved in the efforts had more positive and concrete perceptions of group unity and objective setting, whereas those who were less engaged approached these aspects with more uncertainty and hesitancy.

Across interviewees, there were varying perspectives on approaches to the Coalition's next steps. Some interviewees were passionate about developing a process, while others were more interested in advancing projects. Wondolleck and Yaffee (2017) state that an effective and rewarding process must (1) be compelling and worthwhile for those involved, (2) promote ownership of associated resources, activities, and projects, (3) be perceived as credible both internally and externally, and (4) include well managed and focused facilitation. We did not feel that these diverse opinions or priorities were a weakness, but instead found that there was a lack of recognition amongst contributors around the value of leveraging each approach in concert with others.

Numerous interviewees mentioned a lack of tribal representation in Coalition efforts, with aspirations for increased engagement moving forward. We perceived this lack of tribal participation as a weakness, but also noted future engagement as a clear opportunity. Interviewees frequently paired these sentiments with positive feedback around the region's recent efforts to remove a dam on the Lower Boardman River, which has involved notable leadership by the Grand Traverse Band of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians. The tribes have a rich understanding of and strong connection with the region's natural resources. Regional actors need to find ways to connect with tribal leaders, starting by listening to and learning from their expertise.

Similarly, some interviewees shared a desire for broader community engagement by the Coalition. Those who agreed felt that public involvement was an element that should be included early and intentionally. Grounding early efforts in the community can provide an invaluable burst of energy to newly formed groups and initiatives (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017). Furthermore, deploying experienced collaborators to engage on the ground can excel relationship building and establish trust within a community (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017). If community engagement is not included in the Coalition's efforts, the group could struggle to gain future support and acceptance region wide.

Opportunities & Threats of Coalition Efforts

The Coalition stands at a pivotal point in their forming phase which includes a delicate balance of both opportunities and threats. The novelty of the group opens a range of available possibilities, but the Coalition also faces looming threats that could become more serious if not addressed soon.

In terms of threats, some interviewees remarked on a lack of a unifying factor for the group. Building both professional and personal relationships is invaluable to unifying Coalition efforts, but the process takes time, commitment, and energy. As relationships build, contributors will recognize the value of meeting is in the ability to problem solve, learn, and work together in a transformative way (Kania and Kramer, 2011). In line with this sentiment, some contributors also voiced a desire for increased commitment and participation by Coalition contributors, noting that participation was in jeopardy due to both internal and external factors. A way to address this is through facilitating productive meetings and creating clear agendas. A key part of establishing internal group commitment will include assigning contributors to roles that reinforce the unique value their organization holds within the larger group (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017). If internal and external threats are not addressed, a lack of unity and commitment could severely inhibit future collaboration and progress of the Coalition (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017).

Expectation management was a common threat noted by interviewees, specifically in relation to roles, communication, and funding. Some interviewees desired more robust communication from leadership to provide added clarity and establish concrete frameworks that will sustain Coalition efforts long term. Role uncertainty threatens accountability frameworks and sustained progress. Developing explicit, written guidelines for contributors to understand and navigate their roles is critical for accountability and maintaining a focus on advancing objectives (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017). Moving forward, it will be up to Coalition leadership to establish clear, written roles for contributors to be effective in their positions. Additionally, unclear guidelines for communication and data sharing processes muddle information and lead to misunderstandings. Lastly, avoiding funding conversations threatens the ability to set clear mechanisms to pursue

Coalition goals. Providing added clarity around guidelines for communication and intentions for future finding will allow the Coalition progress with confidence.

Similar to the rest of the country, the Grand Traverse region experiences multiple scales of social polarization that may threaten Coalition unity and progress. Those who populate the region, both seasonally and year-round, carry an array of contrasting perspectives based on their cultural, generational, and geographic identities. Facing tough conversations with patience, civility, and respect will give the Coalition the ability to navigate conflict. Contributors must continue growing their abilities to talk to those with differing views and work constructively by listening to others and attempting to understand conflicting perspectives (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017). One method to address conflict or contrasting perspectives is to give each contributor uninterrupted time in meetings to talk about their perspective on the topic at hand. This exercise provides a safe place for sharing and understanding of differing viewpoints across Coalition contributors. Individual time to share can be followed by a group discussion in the next meeting, giving contributors time to ruminate on all perspectives. While diversity is certainly a strength, an inability to respect and appreciate differing opinions could threaten the Coalition's ability to integrate a unifying effort across the region. Specifically, within-region polarization could severely hinder efforts to directly address topics such as climate change, racial injustice, and regional development.

We also found clear opportunities that the Coalition can act upon to leverage strengths, and minimize weaknesses and threats. Interestingly, many interviewees positively discussed using storytelling as a tool to communicate Coalition progress and success within the region. Some interviewees noted storytelling as a qualitative way to depict the intangible impacts, relationships, and progress supporting quantitative metrics in the scorecard. While data will allow the Coalition to track change, interviewees differentiated storytelling as a way to show and communicate change. Storytelling also provides opportunities to build a positive reputation and allow the public to see themselves represented in the Coalition's efforts. However, when building relationships and reputation, it's important to be realistic about the time it takes to build and establish trust. Project plans must include steps to frequently continually inform the community of progress and success, by which trust is incrementally gained (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017).

Project plans must include steps to frequently inform the community of progress and success (Wondolleck and Yaffee, 2017). Many interviewees supported using storytelling as a tool to communicate Coalition progress and success within the region. Storytelling acts as a creative way to communicate both raw data and intangible impacts, relationships, and progress supporting quantitative metrics in the scorecard. Narrative-based information sharing also provides opportunities for the Coalition to build a positive reputation and allow the public to see themselves represented in the group's efforts.

Many interviewees recognized an opportunity to expand efforts around diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) through a direct and honest approach. While the region experiences polarization, the Coalition has an opportunity to lead by example through direct frameworks to advance DEI initiatives, and specifically racial justice, in the region. It was noted that a direct DEI framework should be a fundamental component of the Coalition's work and requires a willingness to lean into uncomfortable conversations. Missing this opportunity could threaten robust and impactful progress that benefits all those who live in or visit the region.

Assumptions & Limitations

Case Studies

As a part of our site selection process, we placed significant value on the 'identity' of Great Lakes coastal communities. Because of the nature of their histories and circumstances, we assumed the communities shared a significant number of traits across a wide variety of identifiers. We also expected the communities to strive for coastal-specific goals such as water access and cleanliness, a general appreciation for the Great Lakes, and high-level desire to increase the well-being of their community.

Our case studies were limited by the number of sites we were able to assess and our overall capacities. While time limitations apply to the latter, the discrepancy between site recommendation and ultimate site selection hinged on our ability to find clear identifiers of success in public sources (e.g., example websites, news outlets, or social media platforms). For example, there were multiple instances of other Great Lakes One Water (GLOW) communities being referred to as having accomplished successful projects, but their success was not readily accessible on public sources. Specifically, some efforts lacked organizational websites or had outdated content; lacked significant media coverage before, during, or after project completion; or did not clearly list a relevant local contact. This resource constraint and focus on technological identifiers, would induce bias against organizations conducting project work that lack capacity or funding to engage in online-based awareness campaigns. With that said, it is important to note that our site selection was not meant to imply that successful and progressive sustainability efforts are not happening in other communities.

The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated interviewee identification and solicitation. Our original intent was to conduct in-person site visits and interviews over multiple days in each area, covering as many interviews as possible. University travel restrictions prevented site visits, therefore our interviewees had to have the technological means to conduct phone or video interviews. Our case study visits were also supposed to allow for a first-hand interaction with broader local efforts to hear perspectives across a wider spectrum of interviewees. In losing this, we were unable to interview candidates across communities, and instead had to use selected individuals as representatives of the region. A follow-on study might choose interviewees holding the same position in different cities.

Coding

Node and sub-node development were influenced by prior conversations with Grand Traverse interviewees. We did not assign positive or negative tone to node selections, resulting in an assumed neutrality in all node percent coverage reported. Instead, we inferred tone on a case-by-case basis by listening to interview audio. Prior to coding, each node was defined and we assumed each interview coder interpreted definitions in the same way and assigned nodes equally. Because of our unfamiliarity with the coding software, our approaches to the coding process were less clear initially and limited our efficiency with the product and observations. We were also limited by our initial node selections. As we synthesized our data, it was clear that additional nodes could have been beneficial, for example, a node for regional or organizational data collection would have added value to our final analysis. Conversely, the legal node could have been removed, as it wasn't the focus of our research. Node creation and definition, and bias

of coder could have skewed our final percent coverages, limiting the applicability of these data. However, the themes pulled from interviewees were still valuable and likely not impacted because they were qualitative.

Feedback Session

Only a subset of Coalition contributors were able to attend the feedback session, which narrowed the scope of our observations. However, due to moderate attendance and the presence of new perspectives beyond our initial interviewees, we assumed that findings would largely represent the collective perspectives of Coalition contributors. While a diverse contributor base presents a range of perspectives, we assumed that everyone shared a similar passion to advance regional sustainability and quality of life. We worked with Coalition leadership to strategically assign interdisciplinary breakout groups during the session and assumed their perspective provided proper diversification within the groups.

Additionally, the session was limited by time constraints that were employed out of respect for contributors who were likely overextended in their jobs to keep up with added pressure from the COVID-19 pandemic. Extra time to digest initial findings with contributors would have allowed us to further explore consensus or disagreement across thematic rankings. We intentionally presented the attendees with a synthesized list of themes from our coding review of the Coalition interviews to inspire broad discussion around the topics and to provide a healthy challenge. This did not include findings from general community interviews though, which may have yielded other themes not explored by the Coalition Contributors. Because of this our synthesis could have felt limiting to some attendees who perceived the themes as oversimplified or difficult to compare.

SWOT Analysis

For the SWOT analysis, we assumed each interviewee represented their own unique opinions, perspectives and experiences, and did not represent the collective perspective of the Coalition or greater Grand Traverse region. To present high level trends, we included the most valuable or frequently stated topics and acknowledged that not everyone agreed with or mentioned each of the points included in the SWOT analysis. Because we confirmed confidentiality at the beginning of each interview, we also assumed that interviewee responses were honest and genuine without influence from the interviewers, Coalition leadership, or peers. This assumption played an important role in our research because our data were collected anecdotally instead of through real-time observation of Coalition efforts.

Our involvement with this project represented an external, unbiased review of Coalition efforts. However, while our external evaluation provided objectivity to SWOT categorization, internal stakeholders might confirm or negate placement of topics within the SWOT quadrants. We also noticed opportunities for various topics to be dually placed in multiple categories, due to contrasting opinions among interviewees or because some topics were inherently complex. Additionally, we noted multiple limitations to the use of a SWOT analysis for our study. First, our results represent a specific time frame in the Coalition's developmental history; as efforts progress, we anticipate topics will not remain static within the SWOT framework. Instead, themes may shift between the SWOT quadrants as time passes and contexts change. Second, we found SWOT to be a limiting analysis because it simply lists realities without plans for action. For this reason, we used additional tools, such as the TOWS matrix, to actionize SWOT results into a set of recommendations and strategies that can be acted upon by the Coalition and their leadership.

Shifting the Coalition from Planning to Action

Elements of Effective Implementation and Progress

Our findings from regional case studies and Grand Traverse interviews revealed themes that strongly reflect those described by prominent research in the field studying collaborative initiatives. Here we summarize the advice within two resources that illustrate the critical components needed to activate sustained progress in complex, collaborative efforts, like the Coalition.

Bricks and Mortar

Wondolleck and Yaffee's book *Marine Ecosystem-Based Management in Practice: Different Pathways, Common Lessons* (2017) presents examples of collaborative problem solving in marine-based communities and common elements that made these efforts successful. Wondolleck and Yaffee simplify these critical elements into two categories: bricks and mortar. To paraphrase Wondolleck and Yaffee, bricks represent tangible elements that act as a foundation for success and mortar represents the intangible elements that hold the bricks together and sustain collective action. For the Coalition, bricks include the physical gathering of contributors, clear and written objectives and guidelines, structures that organize group work, and data tracking frameworks (i.e., the regional scorecard). Complementary to the bricks, the Coalition's mortar includes positive group culture, high quality professional and personal relationships, effective and inclusive collaborative processes, diverse contributor personalities, committed contributors and leadership, a shared purpose, and a collective sense of place. The Coalition's ability to recognize the role of, and then continually attend to, both bricks and mortar in their formation and future will make the group and their work stronger and more adaptable.

Collective Impact

Similar to Wondolleck and Yaffee's book, Kania and Kramer's article "Collective Impact" (2011) recognizes cross-sector collaboration as the key to regional change. Kania and Kramer describe five necessary conditions for collective impact that must be acted on simultaneously to be effective.

1. **Having a common agenda.** It is natural for collaborative groups to represent varying interests. However it is critical these interests align around a set of main objectives. Discussing and developing a shared vision will allow the Coalition to leverage common understanding in moments of uncertainty and disagreement.
2. **Developing a shared measurement system.** Creating a consistent measurement system allows a group to define their success. The Coalition's scorecard is a measurement tool with clear indicators. However, it will be crucial for the group to outline expectations for accountability by identifying the responsible parties who will collect, update, and distribute related data. Expectations must also include the implementation of a reporting cycle to ensure accountability across data distributors.
3. **Conducting mutually reinforcing activities**. Simultaneously advancing different activities in concert with others allows individual participants and the entire group to excel. Activities that are strategically coordinated, like the development of diverse working groups, will place

contributors in a position that maximizes their specific skills and objectives while working toward a common goal.

4. **Maintaining continuous communication.** Staying in frequent contact allows groups to develop and foster trusting relationships over long periods of time. Continuous communication will give contributors the opportunity to get to know each other, develop a common vocabulary, and recognize that everyone's interests will be treated fairly. Fostering trusting relationships will encourage contributor loyalty and allow the Coalition to reap the mutual benefits of collaborative learning and problem solving.

5. **Identify a backbone for group leadership.** Collaborative work must be backed by a separate, neutral organization that is responsible for managing, facilitating, and supporting the collective's work. The Grand Traverse Regional Community Foundation and an independent consultant with Blue Orange Consulting currently play this role for the Coalition. These parties will be responsible for employing principles of adaptive leadership that mindfully advances group progress, while remaining dynamic and community focused.

Recommendations & Strategies

The following recommendations and strategies provide a framework for the Coalition's next steps. Our recommendations reflect and prioritize the most pressing themes from the SWOT analysis, while associated strategies for action are based on local interviews, regional case studies, and existing literature. Strategies detail tangible mechanisms to act on each recommendation. These recommendations and strategies are not all inclusive, as there may be additional Coalition priorities that were not documented in our research. Additionally, strategies are not intended to be completed all at once, but instead should be implemented strategically through intentional prioritization and planning, as noted in recommendation six.

Recommendation 1. Establish an active and direct approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

While DEI efforts may currently be lacking within the Coalition, contributors and community members noted ample opportunities and heightened energy for new action. The Coalition should act on the local desire for a more direct approach to DEI within the Coalition and across the region by actively addressing tensions and establishing a clear approach to integrate racial equity into Coalition objectives.

Strategies for Action:
- Remain open to, and lean into, challenging or uncomfortable conversations that allow for growth.
- Be intentional and direct with messaging and actions that address diversity, equity, and inclusion across social, environmental, and economic aspects of Coalition efforts.
- Pursue and allocate funding for group training that addresses racial equity and de-biasing strategies.
- Identify and elevate Coalition contributors and community leaders who directly represent or work in underserved and underrepresented communities (e.g., welcome new contributors; identify community-based contributors to lead and provide input).
- Identify equity champions who can act as advocates and teachers within each working group (i.e., contributors with expertise and preferably some amount of related training).

Recommendation 2. Intensify efforts to develop a unifying purpose and coordinate action.

Enhancing unity within the region and Coalition was a strong theme throughout our case studies and local interviews. While the Coalition has recognized this aspect, they should intentionally increase early efforts to integrate diverse contributor opinions while clarifying common end goals.

Strategies for action:

- Foster both professional and personal relationships through rapport-building activities that also establish inter-group trust (e.g., celebrations, happy hours).
- Align diverse contributor interests around high-level goals and approaches that are explicit and documented. This may include refining existing goals or developing new ones through a combination of consensus-driven activities (e.g., individual or small-group brainstorming followed by large group share out and discussion).
- During quarterly meetings, allot time for each attendee to share their thoughts on the issue at hand, with no interruptions, to ensure all opinions are heard and understood (e.g., 3 minutes each).
- Establish working groups that simultaneously advance diverse approaches to Coalition success. This could include a working group to focus on Coalition development and processes, while another could focus on identifying opportunities to advance action toward Coalition objectives.
- Identify and act on opportunities to frame issues around the connectivity of local water features as a way to link upstream, rural communities with coastal, city-centric efforts across disciplines.

Recommendation 3. Expand Coalition partnerships and optimize collaborative efforts.

Coastal community leaders, Coalition contributors, and Grand Traverse community leaders all noted that collaborative networks and strong partnerships are critical to initiative success. Internally, building relationships between Coalition contributors will make tough conversations easier and provide a comfortable atmosphere for collaboration. Externally, the Coalition can leverage a network of local and regional leaders to advance innovative problem solving.

Strategies for Action:

- Develop a rapport with tribal representatives by listening and learning from their regional expertise. Aim to understand their cultures, goals, and perspectives. Offer assistance where appropriate and invite them to actively participate in the Coalition.
- Identify and document the unique value each contributor brings as a partner in Coalition efforts (i.e., what are the goals of each partnership?). Frame and communicate these unique benefits as a necessity for participation by each contributor (i.e., we need you here to be successful).
- Be patient with, and committed to, both internal and external relationships - building trust takes time.
- Identify a feasible way to compensate contributors for their participation as a way to affirm individual value and maintain involvement (e.g., food, funding, or transportation).
- Encourage leadership to play a more active role in identifying unique cross-linkages between contributors and convening partners around these cross-linkages. However, non-traditional partnerships must still align with and support each organization's vision.

Recommendation 4. Enhance communication and engagement with the public.

The Coalition has the opportunity to engage with the community and build public trust by establishing and maintaining communication channels with different groups and organizations within the Grand Traverse region. Leveraging public relationships will allow the Coalition to gain new community insights, share progress, and develop a positive reputation.

Strategies for Action:

- Identify diverse platforms to communicate and engage with a wide audience (e.g., social media, web-based news platforms, newspapers).
- Devise a way to make community members feel represented in efforts that shape the region (e.g., tell their stories when communicating progress and impact).
- Develop a common language to articulate Coalition efforts when messaging externally. A cohesive message will allow the Coalition to develop a positive reputation in the region.
- Create a working group to lead public facing communications and on-the-ground community engagement.
- Engage strategically with established groups to identify regional gaps and expand opportunities for advancement in underserved communities (i.e., integrate surrounding rural areas with Coalition efforts).
- Publicly illustrate scorecard progress through accessible and descriptive narrative-based data sharing (e.g., ArcGIS StoryMaps, tracking social media interactions and sharing).

Recommendation 5. Be intentional with data tracking and progress sharing.

The Coalition's scorecard represents a unique opportunity to compile disparate sets of data that address the three pillars of sustainability. When gathered without targeted effort, data can often become unwieldy to analyze and costly to maintain. With expanding data sets, it is important to keep records of data collection and note limitations of contributing organizations to avoid misconstruing data.

Strategies for Action:

- Coalition leadership must ensure collaborators understand the implications of data gathering and sharing. This requires data users to understand resource constraints and limitations experienced by those responsible for data collection and analysis (i.e., develop guidelines and expectations that clearly outline how data will be shared and managed).
- Devise a mechanism to review data communication plans to ensure legal and practical use (e.g., review written guidelines annually).
- Collectively assess progress annually to ensure Coalition objectives and scorecard metrics align as efforts grow and evolve (e.g., remove data that is no longer relevant).

Next Steps for Sustained Action

To initiate and sustain action around the findings and recommendations outlined in this report, it is imperative that the Coalition have a clear plan for next steps that respond to this call for action. We understand that all strategies cannot possibly be implemented at once, but instead encourage the Coalition to thoughtfully consider our recommendations and prioritize strategies by urgency and importance. Once these strategies have been collaboratively categorized, top priorities should naturally emerge, and these will provide an agreed upon framework for immediate next steps. Additionally, it is critical to recognize that our recommendations and strategies are

dynamic and will require regular evaluation to adjust approaches as contexts change. The following steps outline our suggested roadmap to realizing a unified and productive Coalition moving forward:

1. **Celebrate -** Take time to recognize and celebrate the successes that have already been achieved in the Coalition's first year (e.g., virtual happy hour, recognition of prominent actors and milestones). Celebrations should continue as a regular occurrence bi-annually and in response to interim successes.
2. **Guide -** Collaboratively develop agreed upon, written guidelines that articulate expectations for Coalition roles, accountability frameworks, and internal communication. (e.g., charters)
3. **Review -** In tandem with developing guidelines, collaboratively review SWOT results to supplement our findings with internal perspectives. Doing so will allow the Coalition to identify any high priority opportunities and/or pressing threats that were not included in the original analysis. Consider and make note of additional strategies that incorporate the identified opportunities and threats.
4. **Prioritize -** As a group, prioritize all strategies identified in this report and by the Coalition. This could be accomplished through an individual ranking activity or by separating strategies into four different categories based on level of urgency and importance. After individually prioritizing, gather as a group to determine collective priorities for action.
5. **Assign -** Once top priorities are identified and guidelines are in place, assign leadership to a person or working group to mobilize necessary action steps around each top strategy. Action steps should include target dates for action (including start and end dates with interim check-ins) and define expectations for progress and subtask completion. Tracking frameworks should be agreed upon and accessible through a shared internal location.
6. **Innovate -** As implementation progresses, frequently reference case study findings to identify unique ways to get 'unstuck' and utilize the case study contact list (shared with Coalition leadership) to access a diverse network of Great Lakes coastal leaders who can help with collaborative problem solving around a range of topics.
7. **Re-evaluate -** Utilize tools on an annual basis to re-evaluate the Coalition's trajectory and use evaluation results to refine strategies and approaches as efforts evolve (e.g., a SWOT analysis and/or TOWS matrix).

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions - Case Studies

PRIMARY FOCUS: To learn and document how other cities have successfully kick started and sustained efforts toward environmental sustainability.

THEME: Vision / Motivation - *What constitutes your organizational or regional vision? Who or what motivated this vision?*

- **Primary Prompt:** Explain the ideal vision for your community / project.
- **Primary Prompt:** Explain the motivators that drove your community to taking on [organizations] vision.
- **Follow-Up Questions:**
  - What was the context that sparked this idea?
  - Who were the major players in developing this vision?
    - How was the community involved in the visioning process?
    - Did equity play a role in the visioning process? If so, how?
  - What factors solidified this vision for your community?

THEME: Implementation / Strategy - *What actions took your vision from idea to reality? What did and did not work?*

- **Primary Prompt:** Explain the factors / strategies that allowed your community to catalyze implementation efforts toward [project].
- **Follow-Up Questions:**
  - How did your community shift from planning to action?
    - How did you prioritize action steps to determine what was most important to tackle first?
    - Were there specific funding resources that supported these efforts?
      - Did you pursue any grants for the project?
      - (If so) Did you receive funding?
      - (Alternatively) Where did you hear about this source?
  - What barriers did you experience during implementation?
    - Social? Economic? Community pushback?
      - How did you overcome these barriers?
    - Were there any barriers that you anticipated while trying to implement your vision / goals?
  - What tools or resources proved to be the most effective for implementing [project]?

THEME: Reporting / Accountability - *What efforts of reporting and accountability maintain action and momentum toward your community's goals?*

- **Primary Prompt:** Explain the strategies, tactics, and/or tools that have allowed your community to sustain and maintain progress toward [goal].
- **Follow-Up Questions:**
  - How has accountability been a part of sustaining action toward your vision?

- - - Is there a person or group of people who are accountable for facilitating and sustaining implementation efforts?
        - Internal? External?
    - Does your community use any specific methods or tools for structuring, assigning, and completing tasks?
  - Does your community have a method for tracking and reporting progress?
    - Data management? Software? Meetings? Regular reporting?
  - What have been barriers or setbacks to sustaining efforts around [goal/project]?

THEME: Partnerships / Collaboration - *How did partnerships and collaboration help sustain implementation efforts in your region?*

- **Primary Prompt:** Elaborate on how past and current collaborations or partnerships helped / help you sustain long-term action toward progress.
- **Follow-Up Questions:**
  - Who are / were the key partners or collaborators that helped to sustain momentum across the lifetime of the project?
    - What brought these partners together?
      - Had they worked together before?
        - (If not) How did the partners develop a healthy, working relationship during the process of the project?
        - Did any existing relationships aid in partnership / collaboration?
      - Was there incentive to collaborate?
      - What kept them engaged throughout the length of the project?
  - What aspects of your collaborations / partnerships have been particularly successful in sustaining progress?
    - Were there any barriers that hindered collaboration between partners over the course of the project?
    - Were there any partnerships that would have been helpful, but were not established?

CLOSING QUESTIONS:
1. If an organization approached you today and said they were trying to accomplish and sustain an actionable change , what advice would you give them?
2. Do you have any final thoughts, considerations, suggestions, or comments?
3. Would you be willing to talk again in the future if we have any follow-up questions?
4. Would you be comfortable with us sharing your contact information with our client?
5. Can we share names / quotes as part of our report?
6. Is there anyone else who we should talk to about topics relevant to our research?

Appendix B: Interview Questions - Coalition Contributors

PRIMARY FOCUS: To learn about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of Coalition efforts, and how these impact the ability of the Coalition to kickstart and sustain action toward their goals.

THEME: Vision / Motivation - Explain your ideal vision for the Grand Traverse region and the Coalition.

- **Primary Prompt:** What motivates your ideal vision for the Coalition?
- **Primary Prompt:** Where do you see the Coalition in 1 year? 5 years? 10 years?
- **Primary Prompt:** Where would you like to see the coalition in 3 years?
- **Primary Prompt:** How do you see equity playing out in this early planning phase?
- **Follow-Up Questions:**
  - What makes you excited about being a part of the Coalition?

THEME: Implementation / Strategy - What actions will be necessary to take Coalition objectives from a vision to reality in the greater Grand Traverse region?

- **Primary Prompt:** What strengths exist that allow the Coalition to take these ideas from a vision to reality?
- **Primary Prompt:** Where does the Coalition find their greatest influence?
- **Primary Prompt:** Alternatively, what do you foresee as barriers that will hinder implementation?
  - **Follow-Up Question:** How do you anticipate overcoming these barriers?
- **Primary Prompt:** How should the Coalition prioritize action steps to determine what goals are the most important to tackle first?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - How can the Coalition ensure that each section of the scorecard is carried along successfully?
    - How do you see groups from different sectors balancing priorities when there is so much work to be done / multiple priorities?
- **Primary Prompt:** What do you hope your organization will get out of being a part of the Coalition?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - How can the Coalition extend your organization's capacity to accomplish your mission?
    - Are there any specific constraints that working with the coalition will help you overcome?
    - What capacity does your organization hope to bring to the table to support Coalition progress?
- **Primary Prompt:** What will it take to intrigue outside interest to invest in Coalition efforts?
- **Primary Prompt:** How does the Coalition plan to advance regional equity and inclusivity while advancing scorecard objectives?

THEME: Maintaining Efforts / Reporting & Accountability - Explain the strategies or tactics that will allow the Coalition and community to maintain long term progress toward scorecard objectives.

- **Primary Prompt:** How will the Coalition ensure progress toward identified metrics?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - How should the Coalition track progress and success across the region?
      - Does someone hold the role of intercepting and updating metrics?
      - How should the Coalition track success spatially across the entire region? By county?
        - Are there barriers to maintaining data across each county?
      - What barriers do you see in communicating with other counties?
    - What other methods could the Coalition use to track success? Narrative?
      - How will this be shared with the broader community?
    - How does your organization fit into this structure?
- **Primary Prompt:** What types of leadership roles will be needed to ensure long term implementation?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - How long will these roles be needed?
- **Primary Prompt:** Is there anything else the Coalition will need to maintain momentum?
- **Primary Prompt:** Are you familiar with the Grand Vision?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - What were the strengths / pitfalls of these efforts?
    - Briefly, what do you think inhibited action around the Grand Vision?
      - Were there any positive aspects that came of this work?
      - What can the region carry forward from these efforts?
    - What makes the Coalition's efforts more viable than the Grand Vision?
      - How can the Coalition do what the Grand Vision didn't?
    - How can the Coalition overcome the barriers that prevented the Grand Vision's success?

THEME: Partnerships / Collaboration - When considering the growth and future of the coalition, elaborate on the existing or future partnerships / collaborations that will boost the success of the Coalition and scorecard.

- **Primary Prompt:** How do you envision the community being involved in Coalition goals?
  - **Follow-Up Question:** How can the community be a strength that pushes the Coalition forward?
- **Primary Prompt:** How the Coalition get the community to engage in efforts around project planning / collaboration?
- **Primary Prompt:** Is there anyone that should be involved in the Coalition that isn't currently involved?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - What do you think this person / organization would bring to the table by being involved?
    - Are there any partnerships that could be helpful, but have not yet been established?
    - How can the Coalition establish those connections?
- **Primary Prompt:** What aspects of community collaboration / partnerships have been particularly successful in making early progress in forming and establishing the Coalition?
  - **Follow-Up Question:** Are there any foreseeable barriers that could hinder collaboration between partners in the region?

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

1. How would you sell the Coalition to a local who is unfamiliar with these efforts?
   a. What is one thing you have learned in your first year / months on the Coalition?
   b. What is one of the greatest strengths of the Coalition?
2. What's your favorite thing to do as a local in the Grand Traverse region?
3. Do you have any final thoughts, considerations, suggestions or comments?
4. Would you be willing to talk again in the future if we have any follow-up questions?
5. Can we share names / quotes as part of our report?

Appendix C: Interview Questions - Grand Traverse Community

PRIMARY FOCUS: To learn about the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) of the Grand Traverse Region, and how these impact the ability of the Coalition to kickstart and sustain action toward their goals.

THEME: Vision / Motivation - From your role as [position], explain your ideal vision for the Grand Traverse region.

- **Primary Prompt:** Tell us about yourself and your knowledge of the Coalition?
- **Primary Prompt:** What is your (or your organization's) vision for the future of the region?

THEME: Implementation / Strategy - What actions will be necessary to make the vision you just described a reality in the greater Grand Traverse region?

- **Primary Prompt:** What strengths exist in the region that can move these ideas forward (e.g., tools / resources)? Alternatively, what do you foresee as barriers to accomplishing this vision?
- **Primary Prompt:** How should the region prioritize what goals are the most important to tackle first?

THEME: Maintaining Efforts / Reporting & Accountability - Explain the strategies or approaches that have allowed your organization to sustain and maintain progress.

- **Primary Prompt:** How does your organization track progress and success across the region?
- **Primary Prompt:** How does your organization share or report the progress they've made to the broader community?
- **Primary Prompt:** Are you familiar with the Grand Vision?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - Based on your related knowledge of and experience, what do you perceive to be some of the major strengths or setbacks experienced by these efforts?
    - What can the region carry forward from previous efforts?
    - What do you think would make the Coalition's efforts different or more viable than prior efforts?

THEME: Partnerships / Collaboration - Elaborate on how collaborations or partnerships have helped your organization sustain long-term action toward progress.

- **Primary Prompt:** Who are the key partners that you work with the most?
  - **Follow-Up Questions:**
    - Do you maintain any unique partnerships?
    - How have these relationships evolved over time?
    - Are there any partnerships that would be beneficial in your role that don't already exist?

CLOSING QUESTIONS:

- Where do you see the Grand Traverse Region in 1 year? 5 years? 10 years?
- What's your favorite thing to do as a local in the Grand Traverse region?

- Do you have any final thoughts, considerations, suggestions, or comments?
- Would you be willing to talk again in the future if we have any follow-up questions?
- Can we share names / quotes as part of our report?

Appendix D: Code Definitions

Parent Node	Related Topics, Terms, and Phrases
Partnerships and Collaboration	Relationships, communication, stakeholders, specific partnerships, non-traditional partnerships, partnerships between organizations and community members
Communication	Internal communication, external communication, narrative and storytelling, public education, public outreach and engagement
Environment	Natural resources (i.e., water, air, land, energy)
Economics and Funding	Regional and local economics, business interests, tourism, profits, taxes, investments, grants
Coalition Structure and Process	Internal roles, leadership, expectations, execution of objectives, accountability, approaches, facilitation, strategies and recommendations for Coalition success, mechanisms to overcome challenges, key drivers / motivators
Scorecard	Data tracking, data monitoring, data sharing, crosslinks between scorecard objectives, metrics, general interests and disinterests
Priorities	High level desires for Coalition outcomes, organization specific priorities for involvement
Planning	Outlining objectives and specific action steps, with highlights of and comparisons to other regional efforts made in the past
Strengths and Opportunities	Coalition strengths and opportunities, regional strengths and opportunities, available resources
Weaknesses and Threats	Coalition weaknesses and threats, regional weaknesses and threats, inaction, resource scarcity
Visions	Ideal outcomes for the Coalition and region, definitions for success
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion	Regional and Coalition diversity, participation and representation in regional efforts, decision making structures, opportunities to listen and learn

Appendix E: Coalition Feedback Session Pre-Meeting Materials

Coalition Feedback Session Pre-Meeting Materials
Feedback Session on Thursday, November 12, 2020 | 1:00pm - 2:00pm

Instructions: Prior to Thursday's meeting, please review the initial key themes below which were identified from our interviews with a handful of Coalition contributors this summer. These are some of the aspects that were discussed and emphasized most frequently in our conversations. After reviewing the themes, please fill out the attached form to help us prepare for the meeting on Thursday. You will be asked to rank and prioritize the themes - we know this may be challenging and a low score doesn't necessarily mean the theme is not important; this is just brain exercise! **Please complete the form by Wednesday, November 11th at 8:00am.**

Goals & Visions
- Having a clear understanding of desired outcomes for the Coalition
- Having a clear understanding of how the Coalition addresses regional visions
- Identifying shared goals and priorities

Strategy & Structure
- Setting a clear strategy for executing Coalition goals and priorities
- Setting and managing realistic expectations for Coalition deliverables
- Establishing clear roles for both members and leadership
- Identifying a clear structure of how decisions are made
- Understanding and assessing opportunities and threats to success
- Securing funding to sustain Coalition efforts long-term

Scorecard
- Continued development of existing scorecard and metrics
- Assessing and developing structures for tracking and reporting metrics
- Leveraging scorecard metrics to inform progress in the region

Partnerships & Collaboration
- Identifying and acting upon synergies that wouldn't have otherwise occurred
- Developing new relationships while leveraging partner cross-linkages
- Setting clear roles and expectations for communication and information sharing
- Consistent and sustained involvement of Coalition members at the table
- Equitable representation of community groups within the Coalition

Communication & Public Education
- Emphasizing storytelling and narrative as a way of communicating progress
- Publicly sharing Coalition progress and accomplishments with the broader community
- Taking ownership of Coalition efforts and sharing out to respective organizations and constituents