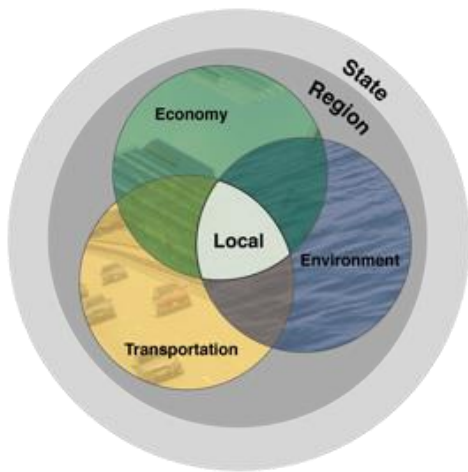


Introduction

Regional collaboration could benefit your community! In Maine, there is a long tradition of organizing, managing and governing primarily at the municipal level. At the same time, complex issues like transportation planning, environmental protection, and economic development transcend municipal borders and exceed the capacity of any individual community to find meaningful solutions. **Regional collaboration offers communities the opportunity to expand capacity to address more complex systems issues.**



Right now, climate action, housing, and associated growth/land use practices are some of the issues that are confronting most Maine communities. GrowSmart Maine is providing a series of three *Regionalism Community Guides* to help communities think about regional collaboration as part of the strategy to address each of these issues. **This focus of this Community Guide is on climate action.**

Regional Collaboration AND Home Rule

In today's complex world, home rule (local government) *and* regional collaboration can work together to support and enhance community life. As individuals, we benefit from regional opportunities. Most residents travel to different towns regularly or perhaps even daily, so in essence, you *live* regionally. Municipalities also benefit as part of larger regions. Think about Public Safety mutual aid as an example of regional collaboration.

There is a history of home rule AND regional collaboration coexisting, working together for the benefit of all. There are benefits to a *both/and* approach. *Let's build on that to address climate change.*

Today's Reality – Climate Change

Maine is already experiencing changes as a result of a warming climate.

"From increasing land and ocean temperatures, to rising sea levels, more frequent severe storms, shortening winters and disrupted agricultural seasons," these are some of "the current and expected harms of climate change on our state." ([Maine Won't Wait, Maine's Four-Year Plan For Climate Action](#))

Climate change is not a local issue. While local actions can help, **addressing climate change demands a coordinated approach across communities to accomplish meaningful action.** And with Maine projected to warm an additional 2 to 4 degrees Fahrenheit by 2050 (*Maine Won't Wait, Maine's Four-Year Plan for Climate Action*), there is a pressing need to work together.

Climate Action Regional Collaborations

Fortunately, some Maine communities are already exploring ways to work together on climate action, offering examples and demonstrating the benefits of collaboration.

The Southern Maine [Regional Sustainability and Resilience Program](#) involves six towns (Kittery, Kennebunk, Kennebunkport, Ogunquit, Wells and York) working together to "create a regional program to support their individual sustainability and coastal resiliency efforts." Since 2019, these towns are leveraging regional collaboration to enhance effectiveness of local government action. The pilot project is being managed by Southern Maine Planning and Development Commission (SMPDC) and is guided by the [Program Workplan](#), with goals of collaboration, assessment, integration, and action. The project is one example showcasing the benefits of regional collaboration – enhancing the efforts of individual communities while also expanding capabilities. Their accomplishments to date include:

- Securing over \$400,000 in funding, including a National Fish and Wildlife Foundation grant to develop a regional coastal resilience plan, the first in Maine.
- Coordinating a regional bid for a solar contract to reduce municipal energy costs.
- Facilitating learning between municipalities on issues such as municipal fleet electrification and sea level rise impacts.

A second example is the [Collaboration to Increase Social Resilience in Midcoast Maine](#). This project involves eight communities (Arrowsic, Bath, Brunswick, Georgetown, Harpswell, Phippsburg, West Bath, and Woolwich) working together to develop a shared vision for better regional coordination to address barriers to climate adaptation and reduce threats. The region is vulnerable to coastal storm impacts due to its older, higher-risk population, reliance on natural resources economies, and large numbers of self-employed residents. Storm disruptions on transportation and other infrastructure can have a significant impact. The project’s goal is to connect providers, responders, and municipalities as a region, to serve the the region’s vulnerable populations and reduce disruptions to the regional economy, natural resources, and community social and physical infrastructure. The ongoing project, started in 2017, is using a scenario-planning process to understand current levels of coordination and to discover opportunities for improvement to help vulnerable residents recover from storm events. The scenario planning process utilizes the [Maine Coastal Risk Explorer](#) tool, developed by Blue Sky Planning, Bowdoin College and The Nature Conservancy. One of the outcomes of the project will be a model that can be used by other small communities in other regions of Maine. A 2021 presentation on [The Social Resilience Project](#) provides highlights of the efforts.



Photo: Abbie Sherwin

A third example is Portland and South Portland’s partnership to develop a joint plan for climate action, [One Climate Future](#), adopted in both cities in the fall of 2020. According to South Portland’s website, “producing one plan emphasizes the shared nature of the planning process and exemplifies a new model for cities working together to address climate change.” The plan focuses on [four areas for reducing climate change contributions](#) and strengthening the communities’ ability to respond to climate change impacts:

- Buildings and energy use
- Transportation and land use
- Waste reduction
- Climate resilience

These three collaborations provide on-the-ground, “how-to” stories of Maine communities working regionally to take climate action. Could your community do the same?

Want to Explore Regional Collaboration for Climate Action?

Are you inspired to think about how your community might start, or do more, to take climate action? Wondering what to do or where to begin? If you are reading this Community Guide, you have already started! Here are some things you can do next:

- Share this Community Guide with others in your community.
- Contact your town planner or your [Regional Planning Organization](#) to learn if there are any climate action efforts going on in your region – can your community participate? If not, begin a conversation in your community.
- Check out GrowSmart Maine’s [Local Outreach & Advocacy Community Guide](#) for ideas on how to accomplish change in your community.
- Explore the websites in this Guide to learn more about the above collaborations.
- Reach out to some of the folks involved with the collaboration projects. Learn from others about what works/doesn’t work.

Our collective future may well depend on regional collaboration for climate action. It is a long-term endeavor that starts with each community doing its part. The time to start is now. It is said that a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. **Is there a step your community can take to join the regional effort needed to address climate change?**

Additional Resources

- Institute for Sustainable Communities, U.S. Local Solutions: [Regional Climate Action](#)
- [Transportation and Climate Initiative](#)