

# **Creating Order from Chaos: Achieving Consensus and Collaboration in a Crowded Market**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Energy efficiency programs face increasing complexity. Markets and technology are evolving almost daily, cost effective energy efficiency opportunities are becoming smaller, more behavior-dependent and more diverse, and programs increasingly rely upon cross-territory and regional collaboration. Though the Northwest region has a long, successful history of collaboration, these challenges call for new approaches and solutions that improve regional alignment and coordination, maximize long-term energy efficiency opportunities, and ultimately enable market transformation.

Recognizing this need, the Northwest launched a region-wide strategic planning effort, beginning with commercial and industrial lighting in 2015, then consumer products in 2016. The region established a Collaborative of utilities, regional energy efficiency organizations, and state-level representatives from the four Northwest states to develop and launch 10-year regional strategic market plans, including shared vision, mission, goals, strategies, and roles for implementation. The regional strategic plan provides a new framework for advancing market transformation by focusing collaboration in areas with the highest potential for collective impact and, ultimately, delivering greater energy efficiency at an overall lower cost to the region.

This paper shares the experience in undertaking region-wide strategic planning, including best practices and collaboration frameworks from other industries that were foundational in this effort. While too early to assess long-term success, the Collaborative's participants, despite diverse business interests and drivers, have successfully aligned on a vision, mission, goals and strategies for two strategic markets. Participants are beginning to make decisions about new program activities, agree on priorities, and adjust to external developments. This paper shares the lessons learned to-date, which may benefit other regions seeking to set a course for greater collaboration and accelerated market transformation.

## **Background: A Changing Landscape**

Twenty years ago, Northwest energy efficiency stakeholders from Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington came together to address the challenges of a changing utility environment. In the face of potential deregulation, many local energy efficiency programs were scaling back or ramping down. At the same time, there was a growing recognition of the region's collective market power and influence to drive market adoption of energy efficient products, services and practices. To pool regional resources and harness this power and influence, the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (NEEA) was created. Since 1996, the

results of the region’s collaboration exceeded original expectations. Working together as an alliance, the region has cost-effectively built an “efficiency power plant” of more than 1,000 average megawatts<sup>1</sup>.

While the Northwest has a strong track record of collaboration, there wasn’t always closure on the nature of market changes and the goals of market investments. The region often faced challenges in taking common action when it required adjustments to individual utilities’ proven existing approaches, especially approaches that provided them with the largest share of reportable savings. Concern about branding often inhibited or complicated upstream initiatives, and were not fully or properly resolved. Regional stakeholders were not united in their views of how local purchasing decisions and regional and global supply chains interact, introducing further challenges for collaboration.

These challenges are further complicated by the rapidly changing landscape for efficiency programs, presenting new challenges – and opportunities – for fully capturing energy efficiency potential in the future, including:

- *“Low-hanging fruit” is disappearing:* There are massive changes in codes and standards that are pushing markets toward efficient equipment and market acceptance of new products such as LEDs. In a few years, most of the large, easy-to-capture energy savings opportunities may be behind us.
- *Efficient equipment is becoming more specialized and diversified:* Traditional program approaches, with static rebates for lists of qualifying products, are challenged by the complexity and diversity of savings opportunities, such as lighting with controls. In these instances, multiple simultaneous interventions are required and are not easy to address within the current structure of program efforts.
- *Pace of change is accelerating:* Technology in energy-consuming products and services is evolving at an increasing pace, with a corresponding increase in the rate of introduction of new products and services. For example, solid-state lighting products are changing so rapidly that by the time emerging technology testing and reporting are complete, newer models have already replaced the products tested. It is challenging for energy efficiency programs to keep up with the speed of change.
- *Increasingly integrated marketplace:* Many new efficiency opportunities and program strategies focus on entities that cross utility or state boundaries, or are outside the region, such as chains and on-line retailers; for example, point of sale incentive programs offered at regional or national retailers/distributors. With this change comes more potential for overlap of program activities between regional and local programs, as well as misaligned signals to market actors.

These emerging challenges and opportunities require closer coordination between regional initiatives and local programs. While NEEA’s efforts have always been funded by and closely coordinated with local programs, the complexity of utility program interactions with NEEA and with the market increases with factors cited above. This has resulted in some misalignment about respective roles of local and regional entities, and the importance of upstream versus retail approaches.

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<sup>1</sup> A commonly used term in the Northwest region, an average megawatt is the average number of megawatt-hours, not megawatts, over a specified time period. For example, over the course of one year, an average megawatt is equal to 8,760 megawatt-hours, or 24 hours x 365 days x 1 megawatt.

Collaboration is increasingly important in responding to these changes. And the effective collaboration and coordination of local programs, regional market transformation efforts, and state and extra-regional parties is becoming essential to capturing the full potential of the energy efficiency resources in the region.

## **Regional Strategic Market Planning**

Recognizing these trends, the region set out to create the next evolution of collaboration in order to maximize energy efficiency opportunity in the Northwest. Through NEEA's 2015-19 business planning process, the region identified 'strategic markets,' or those in which a coordinated regional strategy could deliver the highest value to the region through greater strategic alignment and program coordination. Specifically, strategic markets are defined by the following criteria<sup>2</sup>:

- *Energy savings potential*: There is a significant stream of energy savings over a long-term (10+ year) horizon, including both current and emerging technologies.
- *Market transformation opportunity*: There are savings opportunities that have high market barriers, or opportunities that require broader market transformation activities in order to capture the savings over the next 10 years.
- *Regional leverage*: There are partnership opportunities that require or would benefit significantly from the aggregated power of the entire Northwest region. For example, negotiating commitments from regional or national level market actors for better pricing or expanded marketing efforts.
- *Link to codes and standards*: There is a long-term linkage to appropriate building codes or product standards that have a strong influence on the energy intensity of products and services.

Based on these criteria, the region identified commercial lighting, consumer products, commercial new construction, and residential new construction as regionally strategic markets. This led to a concentration of NEEA investments in the 2015-19 business plan in these markets, as well as funding for NEEA to convene the region and facilitate a collaborative process of establishing and implementing regional strategic market plans. The overarching goals of regional strategic market planning are regional alignment, improved coordination and maximized efficiency in these markets. The following description accounts for how the process developed for the first initiative, commercial lighting, as it laid the foundation for consumer products that followed as well as planning for other strategic markets to come.

### **The Approach**

In early 2015, NEEA staff began the regional strategic market planning work with its Regional Portfolio Advisory Committee (RPAC), an advisory group made up of senior efficiency leaders from around the Northwest that provides oversight of NEEA's portfolio of market transformation initiatives. While region-wide strategic planning had occurred in some markets previously, the efforts were at times hampered by limited resources and varied commitment to collaboration among organizations and individuals within participating

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<sup>2</sup> These criteria are outlined in NEEA's 2015-19 Business Plan, Appendix 11.

organizations. Underlying these problems, there were not always clear roles and responsibilities for collaboration or communication within and between funding organizations.

Considering the need for leadership and ongoing commitment, RPAC was identified as a natural group of strategic leaders with the decision-making authority needed to make collaboration a priority and drive the development and implementation of the regional strategies. With NEEA’s resources, under guidance of RPAC, the region was able to quickly establish the approach and process for regional strategic market planning and launch in early 2015.

The key steps of the process included:

*Prioritize and stage the strategic markets.* At the start, it was recognized that the region could not take on all four markets at once and there was a need to prioritize. To start, RPAC selected commercial lighting, a market experiencing major change as the dominant technology rapidly yielded market share to LEDs and advanced controls. Through improved coordination, the region could respond to market changes through realized synergies. Consumer products was designated as the second priority, with the new construction markets to follow.

*Establish a Collaborative group and roles.* Next, NEEA staff, working in partnership with RPAC, established a Regional Strategic Market Planning Collaborative (Collaborative) as a coordinated effort to establish shared regional strategies in the selected strategic markets. The core of the Collaborative is made up of RPAC members, NEEA staff, and representatives from state departments, and is consistent across all strategic markets. For each strategic market, two co-chairs from the RPAC membership are designated to lead the strategy development, and key utility staff and non-utility market experts are engaged as contributors in the strategy development. NEEA staff served two distinct roles in the Collaborative: to provide logistical and facilitation support, and to actively participate as one of many participants in developing and implementing the strategic plans.

*Convene the Collaborative to develop the regional strategic market plan.* To start, the basic approach was outlined, as shown in Figure 1. The Collaborative convened for three full-day workshops, each spaced approximately one month apart. The first workshop aimed to ‘level-set’ and provide Collaborative participants with important background information about the market, including current state and trends in commercial lighting. In the next two workshops, participants defined the long-term vision, goals, strategies, roles and accountabilities for the Commercial Lighting Regional Strategic Market Plan.



Figure 1. Regional Strategic Market Planning Approach

Strong facilitation was crucial during the workshops, both in terms of gathering input and gaining consensus from more than 40 participants on the strategy elements. NEEA staff and the co-chairs synthesized and communicated progress between each workshop to manage consensus building and maintain momentum.

*Gain buy-in and approval.* Following the third and final workshop, NEEA staff documented the draft strategic plan and vetted it with Collaborative participants and subject matter experts. The Regional Strategic Market Plan was then unanimously approved by RPAC in August 2015. The final Plan, available at <https://conduitsnw.org/regionalstrategy>, consists of one shared regional vision and mission, three areas of focus, five goals, and nine strategies. Additionally, the final plan identified roles and accountabilities for the specific lead and support organizations to lead strategy-level planning and implementation.

*Establish oversight and management.* After the strategic plan was developed, NEEA staff and the co-chairs saw the need for plan oversight by a smaller group than the 40+ member Collaborative, but with wider representation than the co-chairs could provide. They established a nine-member Steering Committee. Members include subject-matter experts and representatives from RPAC and other relevant NEEA advisory committees who act as liaisons to the various regional forums as well as their own organizations. The Committee oversees the progress of the plan and guides the activities at the strategy level.

As strategic or directional decisions need to be made, the Steering Committee elevates those decisions to RPAC or the Collaborative at-large. For example, in its first six months, the Steering Committee identified ways to accelerate progress and championed a proposal to RPAC for further acceleration of a narrow set of tasks from the Commercial Lighting Plan.

*Plan and implement strategies.* Rather than attempt to begin all nine strategies immediately, NEEA staff proposed an initial planning timeline for each strategy. The timeline took into account existing, related efforts and was designed to avoid overlapping requests for resources. Planning for each strategy is spearheaded by a Strategy Planning and Implementation Group, or a planning ‘taskforce,’ made up of the lead and support organizations designated in the plan. These taskforces assess and prioritize opportunities for their given strategy and then develops a detailed work plan, including task owners and recommendations for how to address resource gaps.

*Monitor progress.* The overarching aim of the regional strategic market planning is to improve region-wide collaboration, thereby improving the impact of individual organizations’ programs and initiatives. While the utility industry is no stranger to evaluation, measuring collaboration and region-wide program trends require different types of metrics and methods. The first charge of the Steering Committee was to consider metrics for collaboration along with market progress indicators for the goals in the plan.

Recognizing that traditional evaluation methods would not suffice for this effort, the approach combines traditional evaluation methods with developmental evaluation. Not often used in the energy efficiency industry, developmental evaluation focuses on relationships between people and organizations and, rather than render definitive judgments of success and failure, the goal is to provide ongoing feedback (Kania & Kramer, 2012). This often requires evaluators to be more embedded in the work, and to report on a weekly or monthly basis rather than the more usual annual or bi-annual evaluation timeline.

*Review and update the plan.* For each market, the Collaborative will reconvene on an approximately annual basis to review plan progress and new market information and trends, as well as consider plan revisions or updates. The intent is for the Regional Strategic Market Plan

to be a living document and act more as a framework that structures the region’s considerations of where and how to focus collaboration. The first review of the Commercial Lighting Plan will be conducted in early 2017.

## **A Framework for Collaboration**

Before launching regional strategic market planning in early 2015, the Northwest had many years of experience with collaboration through existing structure and entities – such as NEEA, Northwest Power and Conservation Council, and Regional Technical Forum. Still, there are distinct challenges the energy efficiency industry faces that call for greater collaboration, and a recognition that our collaboration frameworks need to evolve.

To begin, we sought to leverage past work from within the region, as well as other parts of the country. We also looked outside of the energy efficiency industry to see what else could be drawn upon. Collective Impact, a framework for addressing social problems through collaboration across government, business and non-profit organizations to achieve significant and lasting social change, provided some inspiration early in the discovery and scoping for the next generation of the Northwest’s collaboration and regional strategic market planning efforts.

At the core of Collective Impact is the recognition that large-scale change comes from better cross-sector coordination rather than from the isolated intervention of individual organizations, a notion that has been long recognized in the Northwest. Collective Impact is defined as “the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem” (Kania & Kramer, 2011). The Collective Impact framework describes four types of collaboration, each aimed to achieve a different goal (Kania & Kramer, 2011):

- Joint project: short-term, one-time collaborative effort among a small set of partners, often to develop or pilot an innovative product or approach.
- Joint program: collaboration among a small set of partners to implement a program to address a specific aspect of a social problem.
- Strategic alliance: platform for ongoing collaboration around one or more related social issues, aligning partners and in support of a common agenda and joining investments.
- Collective impact: long-term commitments to a common agenda by the group of cross-sector actors needed to realize system-wide change of a social problem.

Collective Impact collaboration is especially needed for more ‘adaptive’ problems, or when the answer is not easily known and, even if it were, no single entity has the resources or authority to bring about the necessary change. Reforming public education, improving community health, and restoring wetland environments are all adaptive problems. In these cases, reaching an effective solution requires learning by the stakeholders involved in the problem, who must then change their own behavior in order to create a solution.

Shifting from isolated impact to collective impact is not merely a matter of encouraging more collaboration. It requires focus on *relationships between organizations* and the *progress toward shared objectives*. Table 1 contrasts isolated and collective impact. In the Northwest, there are ways in which we partially reach Collective Impact, though there are still dominant tendencies of organizations to work more individually.

Research shows that successful Collective Impact initiatives typically have five conditions: a common agenda, a shared measurement system, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication, and backbone support. These are described further in Table 2 below.

Table 1. Isolated Impact vs. Collective Impact

Isolated Impact	Collective Impact
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizations work individually on what they believe are the most promising solutions.</li> <li>• Organizations work separately and compete to produce the greatest interdependent impact.</li> <li>• Evaluation attempts to isolate a particular organization’s impact.</li> <li>• Large-scale change is assumed to depend on scaling a single organization.</li> <li>• Corporate and government sectors are often disconnected from the efforts.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funders and implementers understand that problems and solutions arise from the interaction of many organizations within a larger system.</li> <li>• Progress depends on working toward the same goal and measuring the same things.</li> <li>• Large-scale impact depends on increasing alignment and learning among many organizations.</li> <li>• Corporate and government sectors are essential partners.</li> <li>• Organizations actively coordinate their action and share lessons learned.</li> </ul>

Source: Hanleybrowne, Kania & Kramer 2012.

Table 2. The Five Conditions of Collective Impact

Common Agenda	All participants have a shared vision for change including a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it through agreed upon actions.
Shared Measurement	Collecting data and measuring results consistently across all participants ensures efforts remain aligned and participants hold each other accountable.
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Participant activities must be differentiated while still being coordinated through a mutually reinforcing plan of action.
Continuous Communication	Consistent and open communication is needed across the many players to build trust, assure mutual objectives, and create common motivation.
Backbone Support	Creating and managing collective impact requires a separate organization with staff and a specific set of skills to serve as the backbone for the entire initiative and coordinate participating organizations and agencies.

Source: Hanleybrowne, Kania & Kramer 2012.

In developing the structure and processes for regional strategic market planning, these conditions provided important guidance and validation. For example:

- *Common Agenda*: While funders of NEEA initiatives may have a high-level, common agenda, there is struggle at times to agree on respective roles, especially in customer-facing situations, and the relative importance of maintaining direct customer rebates versus addressing market changes. The elements of the Regional Strategic Market Plan (vision, mission, goals, strategies, and roles) help to ensure alignment on where to focus collaboration and what problems are being solved through collaboration.
- *Shared Measurement*: While the Northwest has excelled at measurement, evaluation of collaboration is different. The evaluation approach for this collaborative effort will need to provide frequent feedback on how well collaboration is progressing, as well as indication of market progress resulting from collective program activities and improved regional coordination.
- *Mutually Reinforcing Activities*: This had been the locus of prior coordination efforts, but without a broader and more broadly held long-term vision, it was becoming increasingly difficult. Through the Regional Strategic Market Plan, implementation at the individual strategy level must remain coordinated with utility programs to ensure regional collaboration is additive and supportive of programs and not duplicative or conflicting.
- *Continuous Communication*: With NEEA and other regional entities, there is no shortage of communication in the Northwest, though the complexity of problems, especially in the long term, requires a stronger, clearer communication frameworks and channels. For example, the Steering Committee offers a credible voice in the region for the regional strategy, communicating frequently with and seeking input from existing regional forums.
- *Backbone Support*: NEEA provides the dedicated resources for managing the Collaborative and implementation of the Regional Strategic Market Plan, ensuring the structure and processes are in place for effective collaboration.

The conditions and associated structural elements are not by themselves sufficient. Achieving Collective Impact requires fundamental mind shifts – around how we work together and how progress happens. The Collective Impact framework notes several important mind shifts, which can sometimes be at odds with traditional approaches (Kania, Hanleybrown & Juster, 2012). A few important mind shifts include:

- *The relational is as important as the rational*: Data and analysis are important inputs, though Collective Impact can only succeed when the process attends to the strengthening of relationships.
- *Structure is as important as strategy*: To enable collective insights that identify new strategies as the process develops, there must be clear structure in how stakeholders share information and engage with each other.
- *Silver buckshot instead of silver bullets*: Success comes from the combination of many interventions, or interventions that are reinforced by others to solve a complex problem.

In the Northwest, the momentum from regional strategic market planning, and potential to realize Collective Impact, is exciting. It builds on and extends the cooperative tradition in Northwest region energy efficiency to create a further vital shift for organizations, away from considering their work in isolation and toward seeing their work in the context of a broader



system, paving the way for large-scale change and maximized efficiency. Now, to be successful in Collective Impact, we must be nimble and adapt our collaboration as the market continues to change.

## **Results to Date**

While the Collaborative is still in its infancy, the region is already noticing instances of improved collaboration as formerly more independent implementers are forced to deal with the question of how best to collaborate where they must. This process has elevated the rapport and strategic thinking among RPAC members. Program managers who were previously working independently on similar efforts are taking the initiative, both within and outside of the planning taskforces, to look at ways they can work together toward a common goal. Planning taskforces are surfacing ideas that resonate with their colleagues across the region, garnering support and momentum for the concepts to move forward. In the case of a particularly daunting area of collaboration, better alignment and coordination between manufacturer, distributor and customer-focused market interventions, the Regional Strategic Market Plan provided the impetus to significantly increase the speed of collaboration and participants' willingness to consider new, more coordinated approaches.

Of course, there are challenges as well. Even given the improved pace compared with previous efforts, collaboration is inherently a slow-moving process relative to the increasingly rapid pace of change in strategic markets. Sustaining alignment and engagement requires time and resources, and mind shift. Another challenge is resourcing and funding concepts emerging from the planning taskforces. Whenever possible, the taskforces look to tie implementation efforts to existing programs or job functions, but this approach is not able to work for every concept. For example, the Collaborative looked to the Northwest's Regional Emerging Technology Advisory Committee to implement the emerging technology-focused strategy, but no forum existed for code collaboration, so a taskforce was formed to address the code-related strategy.

Some plans proposed by the taskforces have been fairly easy and straightforward to implement, especially solutions that align well enough with existing job functions or regional forums such that they do not require additional budget or resources. For example, the code-related taskforces proposed and implemented an improved communication process between utilities and code implementers. On the other hand, the online resource library proposed by the tools and resources-related taskforce will be more challenging to implement because setup will require multiple individuals to contribute time and resources on a voluntary basis. Larger efforts, like coordinating market interventions, come with high potential rewards, but also pose innumerable challenges when planning the details of how interactions will be coordinated.

These – and new – challenges will continue to arise. With regional strategic market planning, the region is better positioned now to have the needed dialogue, make decisions about priorities and resources, and ensure clarity of roles and responsibilities. Regional alignment on a shared vision and goals for the strategic market will enable the region to realize greater efficiency and collective impact in the strategic markets.

## Learnings

From the experience in the Northwest, establishing the resources, structure and processes for regional strategic market planning, there are six key learnings that may benefit others who are interested in or considering this type of collaboration.

1. *Importance of relationships.* Even in a region where there is a history of collaboration, building a better understanding of our respective business drivers and motivations improved trust and communication for specific issues among a broad group of stakeholders. This took time and was the most important element of success.
2. *Speed versus inclusion:* For the Steering Committee and planning taskforces, multiple large groups with many members can be tempting. A balance is needed between broad participation and the ability to make nimble decisions, keep abreast of market changes, and achieve results. Our current strategy is to take the time to build initial agreements, then use speed selectively, focusing on key tasks. One crucial strategy to balance inclusion was to include *trusted members* of large committees in cross-functional steering groups, with responsibility to report back to their peers and both vet and promote the recommendations of the steering groups.
3. *Importance of backbone support.* For most, collaboration outside of their organization is not in their job description, and there are not widespread, dedicated resources to ensure continuity and follow-through of strategies. With a backbone organization, there is stability and the skillset needed to ensure structure and process are in place.
4. *Engaging at all levels in organizations:* The work of the Collaborative didn't naturally flow within the individual utilities and organizations. It was important to reach out to multiple levels within the utilities to ensure that all of the key people who would be impacted and participating in the plan implementation were well informed and engaged.
5. *Developmental evaluation.* Traditional, retrospective evaluation approaches may not on their own enable collaboration and surface answers to critical questions, such as: How are relationships developing among partners? What seems to be working well and where is there early progress? How should we adapt in response to changing circumstances? With increased collaboration and integration among programs, more developmental evaluation approaches will be needed in conjunction with traditional evaluation methods.
6. *Broad, shared ownership.* As convener and manager of the effort, it is easy to default to the backbone organization. However, ownership needs to be shared by all. This is the primary way that the new regional initiatives differ, and can go farther, than prior NEEA initiatives. In regional strategic market planning, this was the importance of establishing roles and accountabilities in the Regional Strategic

Market Plan – no one organization could do it all, and each organization needs to make a level of commitment to the shared vision and strategy.

Undoubtedly, efforts such as these require flexibility and adaptability. For others undertaking broad collaborations, consider:

1. Even where collaboration has a long, rich history, sometimes a new level of engagement is required to deal with changing and more challenging opportunities.
2. Efficiency programs must increase collaboration outside of individual organizations in order to effectively work with a fast-changing market.
3. Successful collaboration requires a fairly deep understanding of the similarities and differences of partners with respect to business drivers, constraints and boundaries.
4. Collaboration is increasingly important, but it's hard. It requires structure and commitment, backbone organization, and engagement of those with decision-making authority.

## Conclusion

The Northwest energy efficiency community enjoys a legacy of collaboration but continued success in acquiring remaining and new potential requires the region to improve and perfect its collaboration. While this new framework for collaboration has just begun, efficiency organizations in the Northwest are beginning to see benefits from improved regional alignment and collaboration, and break down silos and plan their work together. Looking forward in 2016, the Northwest region will continue to drive the implementation of the established commercial lighting strategy, while learning from that experience to develop and launch a similar strategy for consumer products.

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