



# RASCL

RESILIENT AND SUSTAINABLE  
COMMUNITIES LEAGUE

# Strategic Plan

## 2021 - 2025

# 1. Introduction

The Delaware Resilient and Sustainable Communities League (RASCL) is pleased to present its first strategic plan, which will serve as the guiding force behind RASCL between 2021 and 2025.

## A Vital Collaborative for the State of Delaware

RASCL is a collaborative network of state, nonprofit, and academic partners working to create a more resilient, sustainable Delaware for everyone.

As the second smallest state in the country in terms of size, and the state with the lowest mean land elevation, Delaware faces a variety of challenges in adapting to the impacts of climate change, including rising sea levels, more extreme weather events, and increases in coastal and inland flooding. The state is home to 381 miles of coastline and a population of under 1 million people. By comparison, many of the surrounding northeastern states have much larger populations, financial resources, and long-standing adaptation networks.

However, there are benefits to being small. A tight geography and strong connections among many resilience and sustainability practitioners within the state laid the groundwork for what would ultimately become Delaware's first interdisciplinary, multi-sector adaptation network.

Resilient, sustainable communities are the back bone of a thriving state. The member organizations of RASCL are committed to working together to provide technical expertise and support to Delaware communities in order to increase their capacity to adapt, mitigate, and respond to environmental changes, including climate change.

## RASCL's History

RASCL is a statewide collaborative designed to bring together resilience practitioners to serve as a conduit for connecting resources, expertise, and communities in order to help Delawareans more effectively manage and adapt to a changing climate. RASCL is part of a growing number of similar collaboratives across the country, which are described by the Georgetown Climate Center in the following manner:

"These regional collaboratives take a variety of forms, but typically resemble loose membership networks that may include any mix of local governments; other public agencies, regional authorities, and planning bodies; utilities; universities; nonprofit organizations; and private sector representatives. Most collaboratives have been established on an ad hoc basis; with no legal authority of their own, they aim to build the capacity of the stakeholders in their regions and make recommendations about how local decision makers can increase resilience through their own planning, policy, and investment powers." (Summary Report of Case Studies in Regional Resilience, Jan 2017, pg. 1)

Like many successful collaboratives, RASCL began as a small ad-hoc committee with a common goal. RASCL was formed in 2016 to improve Delaware's capacity to thrive in the midst of changing environmental and climate conditions. Representatives from several state agencies and universities

(including the Delaware Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Control, the University of Delaware Institute for Public Administration, Delaware Sea Grant, the Delaware Emergency Management Agency, and others) gathered to understand program gaps and overlaps in order to better focus their efforts. The following needs were identified:

- More communication between practitioners, including government officials, academia, and nonprofits
- Greater awareness of and coordination between existing programs and funding opportunities
- Opportunities for collaboration on future programming, resources, and tools
- Streamlining and improving the “user experience” for communities looking for resources, funding, and information

In response to those needs, the original team set out to broaden the league to include participation from other organizations across Delaware. The Steering Committee was established to guide this new collaborative effort, and a vision and mission were established. By early 2017, RASCL had taken shape.

The initiative continued to evolve over the next few years by expanding the Steering Committee, bringing on administrative and fiscal management support, and establishing preliminary subcommittees. The Annual RASCL Summit and quarterly Coffee Hours were organized, a community-facing online funding database was created, and a RASCL website ([www.derascl.org](http://www.derascl.org)) was established as a clearinghouse for vital resources and information. By 2020, the collaborative had nearly 20 organizations as members and hundreds of engaged community stakeholders spanning local government, the private sector, academia and non-profit sector.

### “Resilient” and “Sustainable”

- *Resilience* (noun): the ability to recover from or adjust easily to change
- *Sustainability* (noun): the ability to meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs

RASCL recognizes that these two terms, which have become buzzwords over the past few decades, cover a wide range of issues and concepts. However, this does not change the importance of these words in describing the collaborative’s ultimate goal for the State of Delaware, which is vibrant and prepared communities that thrive in the face of changing environmental conditions.

While RASCL members each have their own areas of focus and expertise, the common thread linking the network together is a shared commitment to ensuring that communities in Delaware are aware of and able to adjust to an ever evolving world, both now and for generations to come. In particular we focus on promoting best practices related to the impacts of changing weather and climate, and population and land use changes that alter the environment and landscape.

### Strategic Planning Process and Continued Adaptive Management

In late 2019, the RASCL membership began exploring the options for the collaborative’s first strategic plan. Feedback was collected from members and stakeholders through surveys, listening sessions, and

informational interviews on multiple occasions between 2019 and 2020. This feedback detailed core issues related to resilience and sustainability facing Delawareans, as well as key priorities and strategies for addressing those issues.

Ultimately, this information was synthesized into a plan that not only refined the scope and mission of the collaborative, but also outlined new structures and processes that will help RASCL better achieve its mission. This plan is a living document subject to change as best meets the needs of both RASCL members and its constituents. The structure and work laid out in this plan will adapt based on the capacity of partners and availability of sufficient resources to carry them out. RASCL leadership will coordinate with members to periodically review progress, and make adjustments as needed to adaptively manage in a changing world to achieve RASCL's mission and goals.

## RASCL's Core Issues

While the umbrella terms of resilience and sustainability are broad and encompass a multitude of issues, RASCL has chosen to focus efforts on the following topical areas, based on input from our members and stakeholders. These topics reflect the leading issues of most concern to our stakeholders, the areas where RASCL members have the most expertise, and where we believe we can achieve the greatest level of collective impact.

- Coastal/Inland Flooding & Sea Level Rise
- Sustainable Land Use Planning & Resilient Infrastructure
- Hazard Mitigation & Emergency Preparedness

## 2. RASCL's Mission, Values, & Goals

### Who RASCL Serves

RASCL puts communities first. RASCL defines “communities” broadly, including local and county governments, citizen groups, community-based organizations, and industries within the State of Delaware. The collaborative aims to provide these groups, and the agencies, academics, and organizations supporting them with resources, technical assistance, and networking opportunities to in order to advance RASCL's goals of community resilience and sustainability.

### RASCL's Mission:

To support all Delaware communities in taking the necessary actions to thrive in the face of changing environmental conditions through collaboration, information sharing, and technical assistance.

### RASCL's Values

Sound organizational values articulate not only what a collaborative cares about, but the manner in which those cares are translated into tangible action. In all aspects of its work, RASCL strives to:

- **Recognize the interconnectedness** between ecological, social, and economic drivers, and promote solutions that have multiple benefits
- **Build professional excellence** through active cross-sector collaboration and information sharing among RASCL members
- **Value and integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion principles** into all resilience and sustainability initiatives
- **Empower communities by building local capacity** to act on information and integrate future conditions into local planning
- Implement projects, programs, and community-based solutions that are grounded in **sound science and best practices**

### RASCL's Goals

RASCL has prioritized the following key goals in order to best work toward the collaborative's mission over the next five years:

- Foster collaboration, networking and inclusive partnerships between resilience practitioners, community members, and decision makers
- Develop and promote tools, best practices, and trainings to support equitable adaptation, community resilience, and sustainability
- Conduct and support research/analysis to help inform planning and policy decisions
- Provide expertise, planning and other forms of technical assistance to communities

- Identify and promote funding resources to support community projects in Delaware related to RASCL's core issues

### 3. RASCL's Organizational Structure

#### Commitment to Collaboration

The RASCL network is built around a commitment to collaboration between member organizations in order to best address the needs of Delaware communities. This voluntary, consensus-based, non-regulatory approach is designed to create a space for practitioners to come together and share expertise, resources, and capacity in order to generate outcomes that are greater than any single entity could accomplish alone.

#### Steering Committee

Through its structure and operations, RASCL strives to promote open communication, transparency, and horizontal (as opposed to hierarchical) relationships between its members. For the purposes of coordination and administration, RASCL is led by a Steering Committee made up of representatives from member organizations. This group meets on at least a bi-monthly basis, or more frequently as needs arise.

- **Steering Committee Purpose:**
  - Provide strategic direction and leadership for RASCL in accordance with the goals of the Strategic Plan and the will of the membership
- **Steering Committee Goals:**
  - Ensure RASCL projects, programs, and messaging align with established RASCL goals and core issues
  - Monitor progress towards goals and objectives identified within this strategic plan
  - Oversee and support issue-focused committees
  - Support growth of and collaboration within RASCL membership
- **Steering Committee Structure:**
  - Maximum of 10 individuals who represent the various types of RASCL member organizations
  - No more than two individuals from any member organization may serve as official steering committee members
    - However, a third person may be designated as an alternate on behalf of their organization
  - Steering committee members are expected to commit to at least 2 years of committee service, and those terms are renewable.
  - Upon an individual's departure from the steering committee, the general membership may nominate a new member to serve
    - With the exception of seats held by legacy organizations, described below
  - Standing seats for legacy members (maximum of two seats per organization, although filling both seats is not required)

- Legacy members are defined as those organizations who have made long term financial and capacity contributions to the Steering Committee and to RASCL's growth and evolution since its inception
- Legacy members organizations include:
  - Delaware Department of Transportation
  - Delaware Department of Natural Resources & Environmental Control
  - Delaware Sea Grant
  - Partnership for the Delaware Estuary
- Legacy organizations may relinquish one of their two available seats in order to allow broader representation on the steering committee through membership nomination
  - A legacy organization may also choose to remove their organization from the committee entirely, and their seats then become open for membership nomination
- The steering committee will make every effort to prioritize consensus-driven decision making. In the event that consensus cannot be reached, a simple majority vote will determine the decision, with one vote per committee member organization.

## Standing Committees

Work related to RASCL's core issues is largely funneled through a set of topically-focused committees which, like the Steering Committee, are also made up of and driven by representatives from member organizations. These groups meet approximately once per quarter, or more frequently as the need arises. Each committee will also develop an annual work plan that outlines their efforts to achieve the broader RASCL goals and targets laid out within this strategic plan.

Many of these committees were created out of the stakeholder and member surveys that informed this strategic planning effort and, as of this plan's publication, are still in the process of forming. It is anticipated that these new committees will work to solidify and enhance their goals and charters during the first year or two of this strategic plan. Therefore, the language of each committee's purpose and the goals identified below are subject to evolution and change. Additionally, other committees (either standing or ad hoc) may form during the life of this strategic plan and will be included as an addendum to this plan.

### *Outreach & Events Committee*

- **Committee Purpose:**
  - Develop informative, engaging events and materials for both RASCL members and Delaware communities
- **Committee Goals:**
  - Identify and pursue innovative opportunities to reach new audiences
  - Plan, coordinate, and host the annual RASCL Summit, engaging a wide variety of stakeholders and members around hot topics and informative presentations

- Plan and host quarterly coffee hours that create opportunities for community members to interface in a more informal setting with resilience & sustainability professionals
- Promote and grow the RASCL network and its available resources through various communications platforms
- Support the professional development of RASCL members through educational opportunities

#### *Community Planning Assistance Committee*

- **Committee Purpose:**
  - Increase the capacity of communities to identify and plan for challenges and opportunities related to RASCL's core issue areas
- **Committee Goals**
  - Serve as the first point of contact for communities looking to RASCL for support, handling inquiries internally or making referrals to other committees
  - Provide technical assistance to communities on issues related to sustainability/resilience planning, comprehensive plans, zoning, ordinances, etc.
  - Assist communities with identifying, prioritizing, and planning projects related to RASCL's core issues

#### *Resilient Project Implementation Committee*

- **Committee Purpose:**
  - Support communities and fellow practitioners in identifying resources and implementing on-the-ground projects related to RASCL's core issues through information sharing, training opportunities, and technical assistance
- **Committee Goals:**
  - Create forums to share best practices, lessons learned, and new techniques among practitioners for protecting and enhancing critical built & natural infrastructure
  - Provide technical assistance to communities around project management, design, and implementation, including connecting them to other RASCL or external partners
  - Support the students of the UD Coastal Resilience Design Studio program through sharing expertise, guidance, and mentorship opportunities
  - Promote funding opportunities available to communities and support the alignment of grant programs to best leverage available funding that can take projects from concept to implementation
  - Serve as a point of connection for federal agency partners (FEMA, USFWS, NOAA, EPA, USACE, etc.) and congressional leaders to connect local communities with federal funding opportunities and other resources

### *Hazards & Preparedness Committee*

- **Committee Purpose:**
  - Connect local governments and communities with technical assistance, trainings, and resources for implementing hazards preparedness strategies
- **Committee Goals:**
  - Create resources and educational opportunities for communities that help build capacity and translate lessons learned from past events into road maps for the future
  - Expand outreach to vulnerable populations, addressing equity issues related to natural hazards
  - Act as a connector between FEMA, DEMA, and communities to promote the integration and utilization of mitigation and other relevant programs, as well as to improve coordination among internal and external partners and key stakeholders
  - Support and amplify efforts and programs being implemented by state agencies that address mitigation and hazard planning
  - Promote and track the incorporation of the impacts of climate change into all local and state mitigation and hazard planning efforts

### *Science & Research Liaison Committee*

- **Committee Purpose:**
  - Serves as a conduit that identifies and facilitates the transfer of science, information and research needs between the scientific community and Delaware communities
- **Committee Goals:**
  - Convene science-based organizations throughout the state in order to collaborate on data monitoring and research activities and the development of tools
  - Gather RASCL member and stakeholder input to identify research needs and explore opportunities to align grant funding and research applications to those needs
  - Alert RASCL members regarding new, cutting edge science and information, including identifying speakers for educational sessions and events

## 4. RASCL's Membership and Operating Structure

### General RASCL Membership & Member Responsibilities

In accordance with the mission and goals of RASCL, and in the spirit in which the collaborative was originally formed, the following guidelines have been developed to define membership eligibility and expectations:

- RASCL membership is exclusive to government agencies, nonprofits, and academic groups working directly on topics related to the collaborative's core issues
- Member organizations must have missions and programs that serve RASCL's core constituency (Delaware communities)
- Each member organization must have representation and active participation on at least one RASCL committee
  - Committees meet quarterly (or more frequently, as needed)
- Each member organization should attend and actively participate in RASCL member meetings and the annual Summit
  - Full membership meets twice a year (once in the winter, and once in early summer), in addition to the Summit

### Administrative Support & Financial Management

A robust collaborative effort requires a strong administrative and fiscal backbone in order to keep the mission front and center. The Partnership for the Delaware Estuary (PDE) currently serves as both the administrative and fiscal host for RASCL. This enables RASCL to apply for grants, manage sponsorships, maintain a website and email listserv, and various other functions that might otherwise be difficult to accomplish outside the traditional structure of a free standing organization. Funding to PDE for these services is currently provided through DNREC's Coastal Program Section utilizing NOAA Coastal Management Funds. Over the next several years, RASCL will seek to diversify and expand (as appropriate) the funding available for administration in order to adequately support the growing network.

### Coordination with Federal Partners

As a statewide network, RASCL interfaces with federal partners such as the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and others. While these federal agencies are not formal RASCL members, the collaborative recognizes the significant value of their partnership, and supports active coordination and information-sharing with them.

## 5. RASCL's 5 Year Targets

Through the implementation of this strategic plan, RASCL will strive to capitalize on the forward momentum that has gotten the network to this pivotal point, and continue to grow in ways that support the collaborative's mission and its constituents.

Below is a list of targets or benchmarks which RASCL partners will strive to meet over the next five years. They are not end goals in and of themselves, but they should serve to encourage continuous progress toward RASCL's goals. These targets will be achieved, supplemented, and enhanced by action items developed and completed through each committee's annual work plan.

### CONNECT

- Grow the RASCL email list by approximately 50 new subscribers per year
- Host at least 15 events to bring together and educate communities and fellow practitioners across the state
- Continue to update and expand the RASCL website with new resources, funding opportunities, and information about relevant projects and member accomplishments

### ENGAGE

- Lead and/or provide direct support for at least 10 community-driven projects
- Raise at least \$10,000 to support RASCL events and programs
- Apply for and secure \$250,000 to support projects that benefit Delaware communities
- Provide technical assistance and support to at least 10 local communities through the RASCL committees

### ADVANCE

- Sustain and coordinate 5 committees that collaborate within and across one another to achieve RASCL's mission
- Maintain representation in at least 2 regional and/or national resilience-related forums to broaden
- Actively participate in at least 3 major planning or research initiatives that support RASCL's mission
- Develop multiple funding sources for the administration costs of RASCL

## 6. Acknowledgements

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