



# San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process

## Quick Information

**Agency:** The eight San Joaquin Valley Regional Planning Agencies; California State University at Fresno (Fresno State)

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**Website:** <http://www.valleyblueprint.org/>

**Cooperation Topic(s):** Regional Planning

**Cooperation Practice(s):** Joint Planning Products

**Cost Information:** State and Federal grants are distributed among the partner agencies and programs; organizations house the grants throughout the duration of different programs.

The San Joaquin Valley faced many challenges in the early 2000s, including population growth, rising poverty, poor air quality, and aging infrastructure. Local agencies determined the best way to manage these issues was to approach them as a region, rather than a series of isolated communities. As a result of a region-wide vision and tailored, community-focused implementation programs, the San Joaquin Valley secured funding and implemented programs that are managing for population changes, rebuilding infrastructure, and improving health outcomes.



Smart Valley Places

## Motivation for Establishing the Collaboration

In the early 2000s, the planning agencies of the San Joaquin Valley in California were faced with the challenge of combatting air quality issues. Understanding that air basins do not stop at jurisdictional lines, the regional agencies embarked on a valley-wide effort to develop a long range vision for the region’s future growth between 2006 and 2014, called the [San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process](#). The eight Valley planning organizations—one regional transportation planning authority (RTPA) and seven COGs—formed the [San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council](#) (SJVRPC) partnership and worked together to create and oversee valley-wide projects that resulted from this process.

Figure 24. Initiative logos.  
Source: San Joaquin Valley  
Blueprint

Addressing air quality issues quickly morphed into addressing health overall, which led the agencies to then embark on addressing transportation, housing, and land use issues. Following the discussions that stemmed from a common interest to collaboratively tackle these challenges, the SJVRPC adopted a planning scenario and 12 Smart Growth principles for the region in 2009. The SJVRPC realized that the region’s diverse communities could not implement the new planning scenario and principles using only a single strategy—some areas in the region had populations of under 25,000 people, while others had populations of over 500,000. The SJVRPC established a two-pronged approach: the [Blueprint Integration Project](#) (BIP), which helped rural and agricultural Valley communities with 50,000 or fewer residents implement the Blueprint Planning Process goals and objectives, and the

[Smart Valley Places](#) (SVP) program, which helped urbanized metropolitan areas with more than 50,000 residents do the same.

## Collaboration Structure and Process

Before the Blueprint Planning Process, there had been no valley-wide body of elected representatives to address collective issues throughout the region, so the SJVRPC was created. This Council was representative of the boards of all eight of the regional planning agencies and provided standard outreach and decisionmaking processes to the Valley agency representatives. The SJVRPC directed staff to further collaborate with local planners by creating the Valley Planners Network, which is a body of Valley planners who meet quarterly to discuss issues ranging from local agencies' common challenges to implementing State legislation.

Each program worked toward the same regional vision established by the 12 Smart Growth principles of the Blueprint Planning Process, and staff on each project consistently worked together on processes and products to support implementation. Funding management has shifted throughout the duration of the programs; the Merced County Association of Governments originally housed the program equipment and managed the grant, since 2009, the Fresno Council of Governments has taken on main administrative responsibilities such as housing the grant and monitoring the website.

Each program's funding sources and organizational structures differed in several ways. SVP received a \$4 million regional planning grant from the Federal Partnership for Sustainable Communities program in 2010 and distributed \$200,000 to each of its 14 cities to implement projects centered on the Blueprint smart growth principles, such as creating a climate action plan or conducting a watershed study. A group of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) received funding to conduct outreach and leadership programs among traditionally marginalized communities, and a portion of funding was set aside for outreach to elected officials, to develop a regional hub online, and to host regional quarterly meetings.

Instead of distributing money for specific community-level projects, BIP worked with its 46 communities to provide general planning assistance. Using \$500,000 in State funding, BIP worked with each local agency to determine which planning resources were most needed among the communities and then worked with each individual agency to implement the needed processes and services within their jurisdiction. The process also developed the [Blueprint Planner's Toolkit](#), an online "educational guide and

## Takeaways

- In 2006, the regional planning agencies in the San Joaquin Valley embarked on a valley-wide visioning and planning effort called the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process.
- The eight planning organizations in the valley formed SJVRPC to oversee the projects that resulted from the Blueprint process.
- The Valley Planners Network, a collection of local planning professionals from throughout the Valley, was organized to address a wide range of challenges and topics associated with the Blueprint.
- The SJVRPC established the Blueprint Integration Project (BIP) to help rural and agricultural communities and the Smart Valley Places (SVP) program to help urbanized metropolitan areas.
- The SVP and BIP grants concluded in 2014, but their names and activities continue to impact Valley communities.
- Ongoing communications with elected officials, the public, and non-governmental organizations has built name recognition for the Blueprint Planning Process and created goodwill towards the resulting collaborative work.

reference source for communities who want to translate the 12 Blueprint Smart Growth Principles into action.” The Toolkit includes resources and templates to help small communities update their general plans, change zoning ordinances to allow for mixed-use developments, and implement new design criteria. The templates, products, guides and services provided through the BPI project were placed within this toolkit, as well.

Though SVP and BIP were ultimately separate programs, they have worked together toward the same regional goals established by the Blueprint Planning Process. To ensure that everyone in the region was aligned on the ultimate objectives, SVP hosted a regional planning convention where both urban and rural projects in the region were showcased and discussed. Both programs also conducted quarterly calls and several forums throughout the year where communities shared planning best practices and lessons learned. The annual SJVRPC Policy Conference promotes this collaborative work through the popular [Blueprint Awards Program](#).

In 2014, the group decided to transition the responsibility of hosting the program grants to California State University at Fresno (Fresno State), which turned out to be a advantageous for the San Joaquin Valley agencies. At the conclusion of the SVP and BIP programs, there was concern that equity issues could arise if any one of the Valley agencies owned the grant and took lead responsibility for continuing to implement the programs. By allowing Fresno State to serve as the grant administrator and current program manager, the Valley agencies can remain assured that program actions will remain transparent and fairly distributed among the agencies.

## Collaboration Accomplishments

The SVP and BIP grants concluded in 2014, but their names and activities continue to impact Valley communities. Communities throughout the Valley have realized the benefits of sharing ideas and strategies for solving problems encountered by other Valley communities. Through the Blueprint Planning Process, Valley agencies have also been able to strengthen ties with regional nonprofit partners, such as the Sacramento County Child Obesity Prevention Council and the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency. These relationships have facilitated the progression of various projects and programs throughout the region.

As a result of the Blueprint Planning Process, agencies provide feedback on needs as they arise and leverage shared resources available through the partnership. For instance, the BIP organized a group of circuit planners who traveled throughout the Valley to create planning guides and templates for communities that lack the staff and resources to produce such items themselves. This roving planner program has become so popular that some of the regional agencies have contracted with individuals that now fill these roles annually.

In accordance with California Senate Bill 375 in 2008, legislation required metropolitan planning organizations to prepare a Sustainable Communities

Strategy (SCS) as part of their regional transportation plans. In many areas in California, this requirement forced planning agencies to have regional conversations about cross-jurisdictional topics like land use, transportation, and health for the first time. However, because of the Blueprint Planning Process, the Valley agencies were ahead of the game and had already strengthened the relationships necessary to develop strong SCSs within each region.

Ongoing communications with elected officials, the public, and non-governmental organizations builds name recognition for the Blueprint Planning Process and creates goodwill towards the resulting collaborative work. Easy-to-understand, consumer-facing documents, such as the San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Roadmap, are popular not only in the Valley but also with planning organizations in other regions throughout the U.S.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The San Joaquin Valley includes 8 counties, with a 4-hour drive from end to end. The urban and rural differences within such a large area, as well as sheer size of the region, posed challenges to the Blueprint Planning Process. For instance, project support was based at Fresno State, which some communities felt was too far away. The partners addressed this challenge by taking all communities' perspectives and situations into account and hosting region-wide events and conference calls, which helped individuals build trust with one another and collaborate on similar problems across agencies and jurisdictional boundaries.

Despite the distance, partnering with a university also helped unite and facilitate collaboration among many organizations. Fresno State served as a regional convener for SVP during implementation, and it continues to host the Blueprint Planner's Toolkit and work as an active partner to seek new funding sources for future regional planning programs.

Flexibility with funding improved the Blueprint Planning Process as well. By designating money during the grant application and planning phases to respond to new situations and priorities during the implementation phase, the partners successfully adapted the Blueprint programs to changing needs while still meeting program goals.

The products and relationships created by this collaboration have continued and will continue in future regional efforts. Through patience, trust, and open dialogue, the results of this collaboration proved that a geographically large, diverse, and populous area can successfully identify, work toward, and achieve common goals.

### Additional Resources

- [San Joaquin Valley Blueprint Planning Process](#)
- [San Joaquin Valley Regional Policy Council](#)
- [Blueprint Integration Project](#)
- [Smart Valley Places](#)
- [Blueprint Planner's Toolkit](#)
- [Blueprint Awards Program](#)
- 2015 Blueprint Awards Press Release (see RMOC Handbook Appendix p. 44)
- [2015 SJV Partnership Annual Report](#)