Alamo Regional Data Alliance
Review of Progress to Date, November 2017

The Alamo Regional Data Alliance (ARDA) is a vibrant network of data professionals, leaders, and change-makers who share the common belief that individuals and organizations throughout the community should be informed by timely quality data when making decisions that impact their lives or the lives of those they serve. To our knowledge, ARDA is the only initiative of its kind in the country.

Core Statements

Vision. To improve the lives of people in our region by establishing and supporting a culture of data-driven action.

Mission. To collectively support the Alamo Region in implementing and strengthening the policies and programs needed for data-driven decisions to be made throughout the community.

Guiding Principles. ARDA has adopted the following guiding principles.

Community: ARDA is community-driven and driven by the community.
- has a positive impact on the community as a whole, not a select few
- is responsive to local emergent issues and needs
- is led by a diverse group of representatives elected by the community

Collaboration: ARDA believes collaboration and inclusivity cultivate innovation and action.
- is connecting disparate groups to uncover common needs, foster creative solutions, and maximize impact
- has balanced representation among membership, leadership, and stakeholders

Trust: ARDA builds trust through transparency and respect.
- is open and public in membership and process
- is respectful of and sees the value in all contributions, past and present

History

ARDA's roots are in the Alamo Area Community Information System (AACIS) collaboration organized in the late 1990s. Over time AACIS shrank in membership and scope and eventually became the governing body of the organization now branded as Community Information Now.

In early 2016, 40 to 50 data professionals and consumers from various fields came together to discuss the current state of data management in our community and to determine next steps to building a more robust data culture. As a result, a small all-volunteer working group formed to explore the possibility of establishing a community-wide people-centered data collaborative. Spending over six months developing the vision, mission, guiding principles, and governance model for the Alamo Regional Data Alliance, this small group became ARDA's Interim Steering Committee (ISC). The ISC guided ARDA for about a year, developing a new Steering Committee Charter and election procedures for a permanent governing body.

Governance

The new Steering Committee was democratically elected in October 2017 with intentionally-diverse representation of different local sectors. Although three vacancies remain to be filled in the Local Government & Utilities category, the current Steering members are:

- Mysti Downing, San Antonio River Authority (**Chair**)
- Ginger Walker, P16Plus Council of Greater Bexar County (**Vice-Chair**)
- Omar Arizpe, Southwest Independent School District
- Peter Bella, community member
- H.B. "Keo" Cavalcanti, San Antonio Area Foundation
- Jose de la Cruz, City of San Antonio Office of Innovation
- Anita Kurian, San Antonio Metropolitan Health District
- Richard Milk, San Antonio Housing Authority
- Henrietta Muñoz, United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County
- Leilah Powell, Local Initiatives Support Corporation
- Ricardo Ramirez, Workforce Solutions Alamo
- Emily Royall, The Rivard Report
- Colin Sherman, San Antonio Economic Development Foundation
- Michael Villarreal, UT-Austin Ray Marshall Center

As Executive Director of the current staffing entity, Laura McKieran of Community Information Now serves as a non-voting ex-officio member of the Steering Committee.

The purpose of the Steering Committee (SC) is to (1) represent members; (2) coordinate projects; and (3) provide leadership. The SC will use open channels of communication to seek continual engagement and review; and will encourage innovation as a means to accomplish goals and address change. It is intended that the SC leverage the experiences, expertise, and insight of key individuals in key organizations positioned to provide guidance and support for management and implementation of the vision. The following are critical responsibilities of the Steering Committee:

- take responsibility for the vision, feasibility, project coordination and achievement of outcomes
- provide staffing entity with guidance on related issues
- ensure effort and expenditure are appropriate to member expectations
- address issues that may impede progress towards goals
- help balance conflicting priorities and resources
- encourage appropriate response to emergent issues that may compete with the vision
- reconcile differences in opinion and approach and resolve disputes arising from them
- develop and adopt a broad communications strategy
- report to the community on progress
- participate in in-person and between-meeting discussions and decisions/votes
- establish ARDA workgroups and communicate with workgroup leads about projects

Staffing

The Interim Steering Committee, and subsequently the Steering Committee, agreed that with clear division of roles and responsibilities, paid staffing support will accelerate progress. It should be noted that roles and responsibilities are not static and that the outline below should be considered neither exhaustive nor fixed:

- check adherence of goals and activities to standards of best practice, both within the organization and in a wider context
- develop work timelines for strategies, incorporating shorter-term milestones
- set up and staff meetings and other communications with members and target groups
- measure and communicate agreed-upon indicators of progress
- record and maintain minutes from meetings and between-meeting discussions and decisions
- serve as central point of contact for public inquiries on activities and progress
- facilitate discussions and set up voting mechanisms

Community Information Now (CI:Now), a nonprofit local data intermediary serving Bexar and 11 surrounding counties, was requested by the Interim Steering Committee in September 2016 to provide that staffing support. CI:Now used a portion of its own operating grants from the United Way of San Antonio and Bexar County and the Kronkosky Charitable Foundation to fund that work in 2016 and to augment a dedicated ARDA staffing grant from the San Antonio Area Foundation in 2017. For the first 11 months of 2017 alone, CI:Now has devoted almost exactly 1,600 hours to staffing ARDA, close to 1.0 FTE.

To ensure high-quality work and timely progress, ARDA's Steering Committee Charter and policies require routine evaluation of staffing organization performance, including in a scenario where those staffing duties are donated entirely in-kind or performed by multiple organizations. CI:Now was evaluated by the Interim Steering Committee in September 2017 and was rated highly.

Outreach and Engagement

In addition to the elected Steering Committee, ARDA engages a wide range of people through a number of approaches, several of which are still in development.

General communications. ARDA has a mailing list of 204 people who receive regular email communications, particularly in advance of specific opportunities to engage, like the Steering Committee elections. CI:Now built a new website to serve as a hub for ARDA communications and as a document repository for the Steering Committee, and alamodata.org went live in July 2017. CI:Now also includes an ARDA update in each issue of its monthly newsletter and provides updates to other related groups like the San Antonio Data Science Meetup and the Alamo Area GIS User Group.

Individual memberships. Formal membership was instituted both to allow people to commit to ARDA's vision and principles, but also to constitute a voting electorate for Steering Committee elections. Individual membership currently stands at 90 people.

Organizational partnerships. Building on attendee ideas offered at the March 2017 Vision Phase Convening, ARDA developed a non-binding Partnership Agreement to allow organizations (rather than individuals) to affirm support for ARDA's vision and guiding principles. The Partnership Agreement was "soft-launched" in October and four organizations have signed on so far. ARDA will now conduct a much broader and more active outreach for new partner organizations.

Agile scrum. CI:Now conducted almost all of the ARDA staffing work to date using the agile scrum approach and method borrowed from the software development world. Among other powerful features, agile scrum facilitates stakeholder engagement by letting anyone suggest a "user story" for inclusion in the list of potential projects and by encouraging participation in "demos" where the products of the last few weeks of work are presented.

Convenings. ARDA held an invitation-only Vision Phase Convening in March 2017 attended by about 70 people representing local government, nonprofits, funders, academia, and residents. Attendees included a mix of data generators/collectors, intermediaries, analysts, and users. The value of the Vision Phase Convening was to vet and refine the needs and vision drafted by the Interim Steering Committee, introduce the draft Community Strategy, and gather ideas for projects that might serve as early wins. The next Convening is scheduled for early 2018.

Workgroups. ARDA's Steering Committee is currently prioritizing activities and projects within the context of its Community Strategy. From that selection will begin to emerge both standing and ad-hoc workgroups to draw ARDA's membership and other community players into executing the Community Strategy.

Presentations and conversations. Both CI:Now and ARDA members give presentations around the community to any audience that needs to know about ARDA. These audiences have ranged so far from the San Antonio Funders Group to attendees at a local Smart City workshop, as well as national audiences. And there is no substitute for frequent and ongoing informal conversations, with current ARDA members serving as ambassadors to expand the network.

Progress to Date

Following is an overview of major milestones in ARDA's progress to date.

Founding. ARDA was founded (9/2016) in response to the tremendous degree of energy and enthusiasm of the 40 to 50 attendees at a February 2016 "Data Nirvana" brainstorming session held at the San Antonio Area Foundation.

Vision, Mission, and Guiding Principles. ARDA developed a community-vetted vision to improve the lives of people in our region by establishing and supporting a culture of data-driven action. ARDA also established a mission and a set of guiding principles. (8/2016-7/2017)

Community Strategy. ARDA developed a Community Strategy that also serves as a high-level logic model or theory of change, grounding each strategy in the need that it addresses and the way it is expected to contribute to improving quality of life over the longer term. The Community Strategy is

the skeleton or frame for all the substance of ARDA's work, leading over time to a comprehensive Community Strategy Budget (capturing community-wide cash and in-kind contributions to each individual strategy) and work plans. (8/2016-5/2017)

Steering Committee and Interim Steering Committee Charters. ARDA developed both an Interim Steering Committee Charter and a Steering Committee Charter to guide governance, decision-making, and the collaborative's development. These documents have been invaluable to ensuring fairness, transparency, and consistency as ARDA grows. (8/2016-9/2017)

Steering Committee Elections. With 77% of its formal membership voting, ARDA democratically elected 14 Steering Committee members from a slate of 17 candidates across six categories. Three vacant seats are in the process of being filled by appointment as provided for by the Steering Committee Charter.

Staffing Evaluation Tool and Process. ARDA developed a tool to evaluate the staffing organization's performance and policies and processes to support that evaluation. CI:Now's performance was evaluated by the Interim Steering Committee using that tool. (8/2017-9/2017)

Communications and Messaging. ARDA launched the alamodata.org website and that content continues to grow. Via CI:Now and funded by the Civic Tech and Data Collaborative Learning City grant, ARDA retained the RVB Group to develop a Communications Steering Document to assist in the determination of key audiences and messages. ARDA also developed a logo and a digital flier. (2/2017-11/2017)

Common Data Language. One need identified at the February 2016 and March 2017 convenings was a common language. ARDA adopted and expanded CI:Now's Glossary of Common Data Terms, which has become a living document and is available online. (8/2017)

Ecosystem Map. To support ARDA and as a deliverable for the Civic Tech and Data Collaborative Learning City grant, CI:Now created an interactive ecosystem map of all ARDA members. Much work remains to be done, but lessons learned through experience inform current and future efforts to inventory local data-related assets and understand ARDA as a network. (5/2017)

Project Prioritization Process and Criteria. To ensure that it tackles the *right* work as it moves forward, ARDA established rating criteria and a process for prioritizing potential projects. This process was deployed for the first time in November 2017 and several projects have risen to the top. Although work has already begun, ARDA is in the earliest stages of executing its Community Strategy and project consideration will be an ongoing effort. (6/2017-11/2017)