

Activities Brainstorm List

Updated Draft 2/25/09

Sustainable Cities Network participants identified sustainability needs on which they felt that a peer network could help, or where the University could play a key role. We categorized these needs into five major areas and then Network participants prioritized a proposed short list of activities to pursue (**in bold face text**). Each of the proposed priorities is also identified as something that could be pursued in the “immediate,” “mid-term” or “long-term.” The five major categories are:

1. Information Sharing and Capacity Building
2. Staff Development and Education
3. Coordination and Cooperation
4. Sustainability Branding, Leadership and Policy
5. Applied Research

Specific activities and needs, from both the cities and ASU, are listed below for each of these areas. This represents a “laundry list” of ideas. Each category also begins with some of the comments we heard from participating cities. There is, of course, some overlap, as these topic areas are not mutually exclusive.

1. Information Sharing and Capacity Building

Cities must first address their daily service delivery needs. How can we do service delivery with a sustainable approach? Different cities and even departments within a city have differing needs that can make implementing new ideas and technology difficult. Communicating and understanding these differences could enable sustainable technologies to be tested and implemented. There is also a need to bring together mid-level staff from different areas of city organizations. How do cities deal with communication and understanding what challenges other departments face in their daily service delivery? Even within individual organizations it can be hard to get a cohesive message and direction – and we do not want “sustainability” to become “just another program.” The process is as important as the outcomes, and municipal staff and officials need to be informed on sustainability issues.

Proposed Initial Activities

- **Best practices and lessons learned: (immediate)**
 - **Inventory: Valley cities' sustainability measures and practices.**
 - **Roundtable: Identify what cities locally and elsewhere are doing to integrate sustainability into their operations, long range planning and infrastructure investments.**
 - **Public and private sectors sharing: What lessons can be learned from the private sector; include return on investment, cost savings, etc.**
- **Consensus definition of sustainability – What is a “sustainable practice” for desert climate cities? (immediate start on mid-term item)**
- **Sustainability standards, indicators, and targets – such as a “LEED” style checklist that includes different levels of attainment (e.g. silver, gold, platinum). This might also be a good Applied Research idea. (mid/long-term)**
- **Workshops: Perhaps target two workshops for first year. Solar technology, and Sustainability lessons cities can learn from the private sector are two potential topics. We need to focus on short term return on investment and cost-saving measures, and business has figured this out to some extent. (mid-term, ongoing)**

Other possible activities:

- Demonstrate what ASU is doing to improve the sustainability of its campus operations.
- Identify and facilitate partnering opportunities between host cities and local utilities. MAG may also have some expertise that could be tapped.
- Some cities, often the smaller cities, seem to be more able to take advantage of new concepts and technologies for sustainability. What can we learn from them?
- Establish “mentoring” relationships between older, larger communities and new cities and towns.

2. Staff Development & Education

Working together and sharing information promotes teambuilding and builds credibility for “sustainability” as a practice. At the same time, how can we keep mid-level managers interested and “on board,” helping them learn and understand what goes on in other departments and other cities? How can the broad perspectives that may exist at the top of an organization get down into the organization...and how can the innovative and new ideas within individual units be spread across the organization? Staff development and more specifically education is something that cities look to in order to retain their

hardworking staff personnel and to help them take on increasingly difficult problems in the complex environments they operate in today.

Proposed Initial Activities

- **Professional education (mid/long-term):**
 - **Offer professional workshops for staff development, with specific topics to be identified through roundtables.**
 - **Develop a “SWAT” team of city and/or ASU experts to go out to cities to educate city staff, to make it as easy as possible for the cities to participate.**
- **Executive loan programs, perhaps including an “ASU Sustainability Fellow” from local government to take leadership on some aspects of this program. (mid/long-term)**

Other possible activities

- Bring in sustainability leaders from other cities to share expertise and perspectives. Our focus should be building on local expertise and catalyzing local resources, but outside experts can provide inspiration and motivation.
- Host half-day workshops focused on Energy, Green Building, etc., to take advantage of the knowledge that exists around the Valley.
- Develop continuing education short courses that could be delivered both in person and through distance learning.
- Establish and facilitate professional mentoring relationships between experienced professionals and new practitioners; help translate the informal “management by walking around” into leadership roles.
- Create opportunities for city/university interaction and “cross-fertilization.”
- Professional apprenticeships/Student internships
- Develop professional certificate programs (such as current one between GIOS, Carey School & Fulton School).
- Energy audits– how to find reputable contractors who do what they say they will do.

3. Coordination & Cooperation

Participation in a Sustainable Cities Network or Coalition needs to be diverse in terms of city size, geography, training and experience – both with regard to cities and individual members – and members should be sufficiently senior to make decisions that make a difference. This group needs to provide a “safe haven” where individual participants can speak freely; a challenge for this group is to create a truly collaborative setting so that smaller cities feel encouraged rather than disadvantaged. It is the partnership that is most important here. Networking among cities has in the past been very casual and there are

opportunities to improve this as well. We also must consider sustainable growth patterns, different from what we are doing today: what uses are most appropriate in particular areas? How can we work with builders and cities to be less competitive regionally, and rethink “what does growth mean?” Regionally, we are an economic unit: what affects one will eventually affect us all.

Proposed Initial Activities

- **Provide a forum to facilitate identification of common interests and partnership-building. In some cases individual cities may already be creating innovative or pilot programs on which they would be willing to collaborate with other jurisdictions and share lessons learned.(Immediate)**
- **Development of consistent region wide standards, for example uniform building codes on solar installation. (Mid-term start on long-term item)**

Other Possible Activities

- Identify one or more immediate and longer term projects that will be pursued through this initiative where several communities can work together with ASU to get “on the same page” regionally.
- Identify ways to remove the constraints on those who are doing infill projects Valley wide.
- Facilitate structured networking and communication among cities.
- Identify and improve regional “connections” between smaller cities and the core cities.
- Host regional workshops

4. Sustainability Branding, Leadership & Policy

Policy is a key issue and city staff and managers may feel that they currently lack the means to change and influence it. Policies that made sense when they were written decades ago may now be counterproductive. Cities are under Home Rule and do not want regional mandates, and cooperation will have to be fostered, not forced. This coalition could get regulators talking to each other to help cities who want to do sustainability. If one city implements something new, it can catalyze others’ interest to be willing to follow. It is worth noting that while fiscal and policy issues are key sustainability topics, they would not make good first steps for this group.

We must also define “sustainability,” as there is no consensus definition for this term. This group could do that, and this would build credibility for the concept of sustainability while helping to overcome objections. There is a need to legitimize sustainability and

make it a mainstream concept and activity. While ASU is already working on making sustainability more mainstream, how can we get there faster?

Proposed Initial Activities

- **Sustainability Plans: Describe “sustainable urban form” in regional terms. Assess the implications of our urban form; articulate public value. Help cities draft Sustainability Plans to be incorporated into General Plans; develop templates for community assessments. (immediate; ongoing)**
- **Develop sustainability marketing materials for community outreach. (immediate; ongoing)**
- **Seek to build a culture that is sustainable and changes over time. Part of sustainability is embracing and adapting to change. (long-term)**
 - **Identify ways to implement sustainability policies, considering current anti-regulatory policy environment. (mid/long term)**
 - **Identify local and regional constraints for adoption of sustainable practices and development of strategies for addressing these. (mid term)**

Other Possible Activities

- Articulate the public value to sustainability as a function of preferred quality of life beyond fiscal ROI.
- Find ways to combat “Urban Attention Deficit Disorder” to ensure that sustainability does not become a “flavor of the month” to be discarded when the economy recovers.
- Develop an “Urban Incubator” concept – small ASU campuses around the urban edge could spur development, along the lines of an “in the field” laboratory.
- Demonstrate viable alternatives to unsustainable fiscal models that foster competition.
- Work with MAG committees that promote coordination. It will be important to engage the existing committee and decision-making structure.
- Foster economic development and help to prepare the workforce: Sustainability as an industry.
- Document previous accomplishments and current efforts related to sustainability and determine how best to promote these both locally and nationally.
- Write articles and op-ed’s for national media; develop material that can be used in presentations at professional meetings and other opportunities, etc.
- Conduct an advertising campaign, perhaps in conjunction with organizations such as MAG, GPEC, Valley Forward, etc.

- Identify fruitful areas for local sustainability researchers and practitioners to take on national leadership and engagement roles and provide support for these efforts.

5. Applied Research

We will need to show on-the-ground successes and tangible outcomes. City staff are cautious, as the downside is so extreme for them. A short-term “win” will build credibility for this effort and for sustainability in general, and will gain leverage. These efforts must be practical; a first step is the identification of short- and long-term research and technical assistance needs, which could include work on a number of the topics listed above, as well as the identification of lessons learned from university research, and packaging these in a useful way for local practitioners.

Proposed Initial Activities

- **Solar technology: use in city facilities, codes/standards, technical info such as ROI, lifecycle, durability, use in remote locations (immediate start; mid-term item)**
- **Study on buildings for a desert environment – design, orientation, colors, materials, landscaping, etc.; including needed capital, operating costs, and benefits. (mid/long term)**
- **Connect cities to the applied research faculty and capacity at ASU: workshop courses, “field” laboratories, projects; studio/workshop semester classes with local communities as the “clients” for student projects – mid-term; ongoing**

Other Possible Activities

- Specific areas for applied research that have been raised thus far include:
 - Water (including stormwater management and Low Impact Design) – Energy – Air
 - Initiate project to identify constraints to improving sustainability and to recommend approaches to addressing them (e.g. building codes, infrastructure design standards, particularly for road width and/or construction materials).
 - Addressing the Urban Heat Island, including helping people be comfortable enough to walk (e.g. to bus stop); shade – desert vs. non-desert trees, other structures
 - Health impact assessments of different community sustainability practices and developments (a few California communities are doing this).
 - Green building and Sustainable Materials, including regreening older buildings and neighborhoods

- ASU testing of alternative materials, e.g., pavements: are they really better? Do they have sufficient life span? Was it a good investment?
- Monitoring and evaluation of green roof project(s) such as that in Tempe, perhaps by students
- Assist with Planning for Sustainability & Urban Form: what mix makes sense – energy, safety, time, etc. What are the implications?
- Compact development: how to do it in the Valley with various schemes appropriate to different types of localities; detailed cost-benefit analysis
- ASU demonstration projects such as the traffic calming and shading improvements on College Avenue. Perhaps these efforts could be linked to pavement testing or ASU monitoring of effectiveness
- Open Space, Conservation & Ecosystem Services
- Opportunities for Adaptive Management and enhancing resiliency
- Exploring the relationship between alternate urban forms and building materials and the urban heat island
- Developing the methodology for calculating carbon (and other resource use) footprints
- Transportation and travel
- Sharing information on, e.g., hybrid vehicles and how they work in the desert – not national data
- ASU testing and development of regionally appropriate recommendations for alternative fuels such as bio- and algae-derived fuels and alt. fuel vehicles
- Grey Water systems at the individual (house) level – and we can collect it but there is no place to store it. (*water is so cheap that there is no fiduciary reason to recycle or conserve it*)
- Waste management, reduction and recycling
- Assistance with development of sustainability-related ordinances
- Utilization of Decision Theater for scenario development & planning
- Purchasing & supply chain management, perhaps with links to recycling and reuse programs
- Determine the best procurement methods for fuels, supplies etc.?
- Develop criteria for greening of retail operations and programs for public sector to encourage green businesses
- Initiate local “Green Clearinghouse” listserv for sharing information
- Speaker Bureau and Web info –