

Sustainability Now!
Workshop on the Certification of Sustainability Practitioners

Monday, April 17, 2006

George Washington University
800 21st St. NW
Washington, DC 20052

Workshop Discussion Results

Breakout #1 -- Scope of Sustainability Practice

Different Disciplines/Professions that Might be Involved:

Environmental Justice (human rights)	Policy
Marketing	Architecture
NGO Representation	Anthropologist
Economist (responsible investing)	Physics
Sociology	Geology
Public Health	Hydrology
Facilitation and Conflict Resolution	Environmental Data Management (GIS, etc.)
Communications (public relations)	Development (3 rd world communities)
Planning	Business Management and Strategy
Ecologist	International Affairs
Agriculture	Engineering
Philosophy and Ethics	Legal
Governmental Affairs	Energy (industrial ecology & efficiency)

Tasks of a Sustainability Practitioner:

Long-range strategic planning
Long-term visioning/strategic development versus short-term practice
Develop a program - propound (advocate) an idea

Broad knowledge base
Systems thinkers
Environmental scientist (multi-dimensional focus)
Identifying and addressing core values and interests
Undertaking tasks or activities beyond core competency
Urban planning -- regeneration of urban areas

Facilitation of public consultation
Facilitating performance standards in conformance with sustainability
Metrics and benchmarking -- indicator assessments

Design stakeholder participation that is inclusive (experts, volunteers, talented amateurs, public leaders)

Translate research into practice
Stimulate entrepreneurial spirit
Organizational development
Change management
Innovation through application and problem-solving
Diagnostic ability
Flexibility

Educators
Education of stakeholders in sustainability policy

Community business leaders and animation

Internet and media communications

Possible Assumptions of a Certification Program for Sustainability:

(Program Elements)

- Different levels of certification
- Tools, checklists, guidebooks, assessment & training resources
- Definitions and terminology
- Certification maintenance
- Continuing education (versus full re-certification): freshness of topics/issues; baseline criteria with core skills
- Code of ethics

(Truths or Aspirational Goals)

- Everyone wants a high quality of life
- Emotion and passion
- Are there skills that are not sustainable? (what are the boundaries of knowledge; how far does the base of knowledge go)
- Definitions will always differ
- Status quo is unbalanced
- Inertia is significant for the status quo
- Flexibility is required in an evolving field

(Rules of the Game)

- Affordable and accessible
- Fairness with equal representation and opportunities
- Keep the rules broad and inclusive
- Allow principles that apply across organizations and fields

(Possible Goals/Outcomes - Open Questions)

- There will be many practitioners globally and maybe regionally
- Enhancing/expanding existing certification bodies
- Client ownership
- Culturally sensitive and contextually appropriate (present alternatives as honestly and relevantly as possible, but local community decides)

(Individuals Bring These Traits/Strengths to the Process)

- Level of experience
- Critical thinking
- Practitioner networks and teams to balance core skills
- Integration of interdisciplinary/multi-disciplinary knowledge
- Multi-disciplines and systems thinking
- The 3 Es (environment, equity, economy) included, addressed, and balanced

Breakout #2 -- Criteria & Standards of Knowledge, Skills, Education, and Experience for Certification (Includes means of measuring)

Board of Approval (top level people who would be independent and neutral for approval evaluation)

Different areas of evaluation: (mix and match to allow different levels of rating)

Education	20%
Publicizing	20%
Exposure (diversity)	25%
Discipline (diversity)	25%
Personal lifestyle choices	10%
Examination (what grade level - how to access?)	15%
Awards	10%

Publicize sustainability work

- refereed publications
- professional reports
- invitational articles
- trade presentations/papers

Level of Certification (basic, better, highest)

education (primary - GED; BA/BS in 1 discipline; BA/BS in 2 disciplines, etc.)

Sustainability knowledge

- degree requirements
- academic/scholarly work
- professional experience

Demonstration of evaluation/changed business or organization process

- juried process
- affirmative paper by applicant
- paper revised based on jury comments for final score

Appropriate degree or experience (qualification for renewal)

- 2 yrs plus degree
- 5 yrs without degree (includes technical degrees)
- list of approved degrees
- bachelor is minimum for degree
- submit via application or by invitation

continuing education (approved core of courses) and experience (every 2 yrs renew)
demonstrated and practicing

Education and experience

educational experience (bachelors degree in economics, environment and social sciences)
level of teaching reached
potential core set of 4 out of 8 knowledge bases
significant on-the-ground experience (i.e. 30 days over 5 yrs or without appropriate
education, 150 days over 5 yrs) indicated by
teaching
community organizing and facilitating
other professional experience

Multiple paths for certification needed (where education and experience are mixed and matched):
specialists from each avenue should create measurement tools accordingly
These paths would include the following to support work on energy, materials, technology,
society, ethics, and systems (thinking and reproduction)

People:

- quality of life
- health
- diversity/equality (including ethics, religion, and economics)
- housing
- transport

Planet:

- air
- water
- land
- flora
- fauna

Profits:

- employment
- business/industry (climate/culture)
- cost/benefits

Ability to lead multi-stakeholder engagement (i.e., community advocacy groups or local regulators)

Have worked with or run multi-stakeholder meetings, programs, initiatives - subjective assessment
provided by applicant in application and reviewed by the "Board"

Core competency in sustainability

- exam (3-4 hrs)
- cover all key disciplines (biology, geology, economics, facilitation, anthropology, climatology, engineering, technology/computers, etc. and see "White Paper" last page)
- multiple choice and essay
- study guide provided

Case study testing - hypothesized cases or case history examples: historical reference to judge the best
answers

Supplemental reading list - study guide (include case history studies and different disciplines)

Special skill sets: (measured by degree requirements; scholarly/academic experience; and professional activity)

- legal and policy
- communications and education
- strategic planning
- change management and tactical strategies
- measurement of performance and outputs

Levels of certification: (including student, training apprentice, and team certification)

- mass marketing
- general
- focused/specialized

Differentiate between personal and business certifications

Have a probationary status:

- in order to retake exam
- for only possessing introductory education
- prior to achievement of publicizing requirements
- to commend commitment through actions
- to create dialogue for promoting sustainability requirements

Ability to offer mentorship to others in practice of sustainability (includes apprenticeship opportunities)

- initial screener roles
- training of others through apprenticeship

Ethical behavior background:

- code of ethics
- sustainability values
 - ✓ minimum footprint with intent to improve and strive to do so
 - ✓ practices what one preaches
- criminal check
- references and recommendations

Self-assessment: determine one's own place in the process

Pros & Cons for Certification

1. Can't define sustainability now so what will certification mean to the community?
2. Certification could provide means of recognizing idea of sustainability audits.
3. Accreditation process will provide value to profession for new people in field.
4. Challenges exist for demonstrating ability of perfect performance because of factors outside our own control - risk of this being held against those who participate in certification process.
5. Opportunity to build a body of knowledge and principles.
6. Board to manage debate in "grey" areas.

7. Certification could have “domino” effect on industry, government and education institutions.
8. Make sure participation is multi-ethnic and multi-cultural.
9. Encourage the formation of a society of professionals (association).
10. Way to engage young leaders and society in general in order to recognize complexity of sustainability issues.
11. Can the need for “generalists” be maintained?
12. Opportunity to form new partnerships.
13. Way to encourage organizations to seek some kind of certification recognition.
14. No regulatory or legislative drivers to encourage sustainability certification.
15. Problem of funding a certification process.

Next Steps:

- Identify sustainability committees in existing professional associations and societies to become involved with a certification process.
- Reach out to potential partner organizations.
- Conduct local government outreach to promote public policy advantages from certification process.
- Understand and document concerns of people who do not want to get involved with certification process.
- Don't reinvent the wheel!
- Develop a business plan - what does the certification process look like?
- Involve NGOs and Small Business Networks for more inclusion.