



Sustainability through Innovation Leadership Center

Sustainability Listening and Informational Sessions Summary

Inspiring and Engaging Leaders

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Executive Summary

This report details the results of four Sustainability Listening and Informational Sessions held by Continuing Education, Economic and Workforce Development's Sustainability through Innovation Leadership Center during the months of February and March. The purpose of these sessions was to identify sustainability needs, challenges, and opportunities by the participants in order to develop programs for our region.

The sessions were divided into four clusters: Tourism, Government, Business and Industry, and Science. Participants in each session were given two surveys, and the sessions were paired with a speaker, who was an expert in the field, to inform the audience on what was happening in North Carolina and what companies and organizations were doing. The audience was then tasked with identifying what the sustainability needs, challenges, and opportunities were and the next steps to take to meet them. The results found different areas of interest, which have been aggregated and documented in this report.

The sixty-six participants represented business, industry, education, non-profits, private citizens, and state, federal, and municipal agencies. The knowledge surveys indicated that 85 percent of the participants associated sustainability with environmental issues. Forty-six percent projected their organization would increase its commitment to sustainability in the next two years.

The sessions identified a lack of awareness of the meaning of sustainability in our region and a need to increase educational programs that provide sustainability information for individuals, communities, schools, businesses, governmental organizations, and elected officials. The areas in sustainability most highlighted were energy and waste management, communication venues, environmental issues, business practices, funding sources, and governmental and educational programs.

The lack of knowledge of the benefits of sustainability practices is probably the biggest challenge businesses, schools, and communities are facing when deciding on incorporating sustainability. The energy challenges in our area of major concern were transportation in Brunswick County, the increasing demand for energy, and the lack of energy management skills. The loss of manufacturing jobs, employee turnover, and the need for a highly skilled workforce were topics that were mentioned in all four clusters. With regards to government intervention, there were those who felt there should be fewer regulatory burdens, while others believe that there should be more enforcement and regulations. Incentives in the form of tax breaks and funding by the government was seen as a way to encourage businesses and people to implement sustainability. The size of the county was identified to be a major concern for infrastructure, transportation, and development; participants also felt that the county should incorporate, as part of a master plan, greener communities to avoid reckless development.

The sessions also served to start a conversation with different sectors on programs they would like to see. These programs include facilities management classes which include sustainable practices that tie in with industry-led management tools; ideas on how to incorporate sustainability into tourism; information on the economic benefits of sustainability on healthcare; manufacturing sustainability

practices; programs focused on sustainability in agriculture; programs for schools and businesses that demonstrate sustainability practices; governmental informational sessions; consumer and business sustainability best practices; and emerging technologies skill-sets for the workforce. These could be in the form of workshops, classes, informational sessions, or networking events that could foster private-public relationships.

Participants believed that the benefits of increasing sustainability venues in our area included creating a competitive advantage for businesses, increasing job opportunities, and providing a better quality of life.



Sustainability Listening Sessions Results

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Introduction

Project Background

The Sustainability through Innovation Leadership Center (SILC) was established under Brunswick Community College's (BCC) Continuing Education, Economic and Workforce Development Department in November, 2013 to meet emerging needs in the region.

Four sessions were held in February and March 2014 in four separate clusters (Tourism, Government, Business & Industry, and Science) to assess the current state of sustainability practices in the Cape Fear Region. The results will serve to identify training programs, events, and workshops that will meet these needs.

The Audience

A total of sixty-six individuals attended the four sessions, including eighteen business people, twenty-three participants from the field of education, six participants from non-profit organizations, two private citizens, and thirteen representatives of state, federal, and municipal agencies. (Appendix I)

Process

Surveys

The purpose of the surveys was to identify a general understanding of the audience's knowledge of sustainability and receive feedback on how to improve future events like this one.

Two surveys were administered during each session. When they arrived, participants were asked to identify sustainability knowledge and obstacles organizations are facing; what their expectations were for the future of sustainability in the next two years; and knowledge of the services being offered by BCC's Small Business Center and Customized Training programs. The second survey was an exit survey to identify what they liked about the sessions; how they could be improved, information about how they planned to use the information from the sessions, and any additional comments they wished to share.

The knowledge survey identified the three areas most associated with sustainability by the participants: Environmental (85%), Economic (70%), and Long-Range Planning (50.8%). The obstacles identified for implementing sustainability practices were a lack of financial incentives (40.8%) and competing priorities (22.4%); a lack of framework and hard-to-predict customers tied at 18.37%. With regards to their organization's commitment to sustainability in the next two years, 46.1% said that it will increase significantly and 44.2% did not know. (Appendix II)

Regarding knowledge about the Small Business Center: 53% said they were familiar with the services and programs offered, although 58.6% had not attended a SBC Seminar. Topics of interest for seminars or speakers included: aquaponics; food policy council; grant writing; product development; increasing profitability through tax incentives/reduction; and classes in continuing education for our government employees, e.g., sewer, water, finance, law enforcement.

Most attendees (60.3%) were not familiar with Customized Training. Among the top four areas considered as important to the participants were safety, quality, compliance, and productivity improvements.

The most effective marketing venues identified to disseminate information on program offerings were email (79.3%), website (24.1%), social media (13.79%), and newspaper (10.34%).

The exit survey was in the form of open-ended questions. This section highlights the most repeated terms and concepts per question. The exit survey was completed by 57 of the 66 participants. Participants were asked the following questions:

1. What were the most valuable outcomes of the sessions?
 - Networking with others, group participation, and brainstorming activity
 - Discussion, information, knowledgeable, interesting
 - Helpful, eye-opening, enlightening, outstanding
 - Interesting mix of people, diversity of industries, turnout
 - Speaker's knowledge and presentations
2. Were there any aspects of the sessions that were not useful or informative, and how could future sessions be improved?
 - The sessions were found to be useful
 - More time was asked for discussion and for group collaboration
 - More instructions, information, examples, and facilitators for each group
 - More advanced publicity
3. How did participants plan to use the information learned?
 - To educate, spread the word, share with associates
 - Implement change in institutions
 - Have more awareness of areas to improve, go on the website, or take a course

Sessions

Each session cluster had an expert in the field to provide information on what is happening in North Carolina as it relates to sustainability practices. Specifically, they discussed 1) why organizations are implementing it, 2) how they are doing it, and 3) who is doing it. This was followed by a question and answer session that led into the brainstorming session. The clusters were:

Tourism - Natural resources, hotels, restaurants, and entertainment.

Science - Marine and biotechnology, aqua and agriculture, healthcare.

Business and Industry - Retail, manufacturing, energy, and construction.

Government - Municipalities, educational institutions, state/federal agencies.



Speakers were mainly from the Department of Environmental and Natural Resources (DENR) non-regulatory technical assistance agency.

- Tourism: Tom Rhodes, Developer and manager of the NC Green Travel Initiative Program. North Carolina Division of Environmental Assistance and Customer Service.
- Science: Les Hewlett, DENR Reduction Partners. Mark Blevins, Director of Brunswick NC Cooperative Extension.
- Business and Industry: Scott Fister, Co-manager of the Environmental Management and Sustainability Assistance's Environmental Stewardship Initiative.
- Government: Len Hoey, Engineering Architect Manager for the NC Utility Savings Initiative and support for all public sector units including community colleges, K-12 public schools, county and local municipal governments.

Brainstorming Session

The brainstorming session was designed to have the audience exchange ideas amongst themselves about information provided by the speakers. The participants were given four tasks: to identify needs in our communities, challenges being faced, opportunities for implementing sustainability, and next steps to take to meet the needs, challenges, and opportunities. The audience in each session was divided into 3 to 4 groups. Each group then shared their findings with all the participants.

Category Results

The information gathered during the four sessions were aggregated by category (the tasks): needs, challenges, opportunities and next steps; while maintaining their link to the session of which they were a part. Each category highlighted the overall results and identified specifics for each session cluster. The four categories initially highlighted nine areas: education, business, communication, incentives-resources, environmental, energy, people, waste, and government. By the time it came to identifying the next steps, the information was reduced to four specific areas: education, business, communication, and incentives-resources.



Needs and Challenges

This section highlights the first two categories needs and challenges in each area, which, with a few exceptions specific to the cluster, were virtually the same in all areas.

Education: The needs identified in this area included consumer workshops; how to get people involved; business-specific training for staff meetings, strategic planning; on-the-job training, and online training; preparation of students for sustainability jobs; practical steps to sustainability; steps for non-profits; energy and waste management training; industry-based executive roundtables; programs for elected officials; industry-specific training in areas such as pesticide education, automation, computers, biomimicri, and lodging; and daycare assistance for continuing education students. The major challenges identified by participants in this sector were knowledge-based challenges, such as the public associating sustainability with hippies; a lack of an ethical connection; lack of awareness; access to technology for facilitators; teacher turnover and pay; the reduction in funding for higher education; the identification of fun and effective ways to educate others; necessary improvements in literacy education; and the need for evidence-based studies.

Business: The participants from this area discussed sustainability’s potential impact on jobs and the workforce. The needs identified in this area included access to sustainability tools and frameworks, models for business support, attracting job-generating industries, and training for IICRC carpet certification, labeling, information technology and automation systems; connections between agriculture and industry, economic importance of sustainability practices, and local seafood management; incorporation of green campaigns at festivals and events, eco-tourism and hotel needs for carpeting, knowledge in energy, emissions, and air quality systems; green construction training, subdivisions planning, LEED certifications, infrastructure, mixed-use development, affordable housing, building retrofitting, building automation systems, and landfill impact. The challenges identified by participants from this area included making sustainability convenient, participating in free audits and tests; getting organizational support from leaders/administration, getting the necessary commitment from employers and/or employees, dealing with manufacturing job loss, making sustainability integral to business startups, developing soft skills for the workforce; dealing with employee turnover, negotiating individuals’ and business owners’ unwillingness to innovate or appreciate the economic benefits, and recognizing limitations in equipment and man power.



Communication: This area focused on how to market sustainability efforts, create public awareness campaigns, and identify effective messaging. The needs identified were to generate awareness of benefits available to individuals and their communities; ways to target marketing, messaging, public relations, and audiences; how to maximize the use of television, radio, videos, weekly articles, social media, email’s and apps; and creating effective public service announcements in schools how to use valid information, and training on how to answer questions like “what’s in it for me”. The challenges found by the participants included

how to change the way sustainability is perceived by the public and businesses, identifying ways for people to buy-in to the benefits, developing a message to spread the word, how to deal with public apathy or bias, changing the image of being seen as an extremist, avoiding poor communication or venues to spread the word, changing the perception that sustainability is inconvenient, finding ways to help people understand it, and identifying people who are doing these practices as examples.

Incentives: The participants were interested in the resources available to alleviate the initial sustainability launch costs. The needs identified in this area were the costs tied to implementing sustainability and identifying funding sources; the financial and economic benefits of investing; how to do a cost-benefit analysis of investments; and how to calculate money saving payback time for solar installations; finding low interest loans for business development; and where to find incentives and resources to motivate change. The challenges the participants shared included how to motivate people to act, the reasons why people should do it, not understanding the costs and benefits, having the assumption that it costs too much, confusion over who will pay for it, and the answer to the question “what’s in it for me?”; reasons behind compliance credits, the initial cost to becoming green, identifying donation sources, low interest in green projects, and finding implementation incentives.



Environmental: This area identified the different natural resource needs and challenges. The needs identified were quality and emissions standards; water use, reuse, and conservation practices; flood control and water management systems; H2O mitigation and rainwater harvesting; outdoor animal control of cats; alien and invasive plants elimination; and water, chemicals, and native plants cost reduction for landscaping. The challenges highlighted were identifying sources to maintain clean water, venues to protect wildlife, and the dangers of pesticides.

Energy: The sources of energy discussed were lighting, transportation, fuels, and efficiency. The needs identified in this area were selecting lighting fixtures, implementing electricity conservation and efficiency, choosing energy efficient equipment, reducing facilities’ energy costs, enhancing algae fuel production, greening transportation and travel, providing better public transportation, selecting food trucks and hybrid cars, and tracking fuel use reduction and efficiency. The challenges identified by the participants were implementing strategies for energy reduction, lacking a smart grid, net metering pushbacks, increasing demand on energy supply, raising daily energy use consciousness, identifying energy management tools, lacking regional mass transportation, and using retrofitting to save energy.

People: This area focused on the relationship people have with sustainability, the venues needed to generate community awareness, and being able to answer the questions “why should someone travel green?”, “what’s in it for me?”, “why don’t people think it’s a problem?” or “why don’t people want to change?”

The participants needs identified were introducing sustainability awareness venues to community and school related activities and events, and in senior citizen and family recreation centers. The challenges identified the impact of demographics, the resistance of people to change, the increase in the retirement age population, the lack of personal accountability, current individual habits, time use constraints, cultural habits, age groups differences, people not caring, lack of commitment, and no motivation to change.

Waste: This area addressed waste management practices and logistics. The different waste needs for this area were waste management practices for recycling, landfills and resource availability, markets for recycling materials, recycling bins in offices, construction of a new waste facility, the use of anaerobic digesters, county-wide composting, food waste hauler processor, countywide recycling programs for businesses and schools, and connecting recycling to landfill reduction. The challenges addressed were recycling venues, container access, and pick up accessibility.

Government: This area identified county, state and federal regulatory needs and challenges. The needs highlighted were educational programs for elected officials, tax incentives for the private sector, public-private partnerships, continued research, infrastructure for rural development, governmental restrictions and support, and incentives available for greening. The challenges addressed were representation in Southeastern North Carolina, the regulatory burden, and government disincentives; building a better infrastructure, county’s geographic size, county dynamics and area politics, lack of enforcement, sustainable economic development, attracting greener communities, integrating into planning strategies, a green master plan, and addressing reckless development.



Opportunities and Next Steps

This section highlights the opportunities and the next steps that could help meet the needs and challenges discussed. The main focus were in four areas: education, business, communication, and incentives-resources.

Education: This area highlighted opportunities for schools, the public, and businesses. The opportunities identified were educational programs that turn hospitals into training centers/food pharmacies, public awareness programs that teach baby steps to sustainability, networking events that provide a place to meet and take action, provide educational seminars and classes to the public; establish childcare centers that work with kids, provide county-wide

educational venues about sustainability, connect effective teaching with eager learners, and link existing programs to sustainability; offer programs for students and schools on sustainability initiatives, introduce biomimicri training, expand computer technology, CAD, and CNC machining training, and turn BCC into a one-stop shop for sustainability; offer communication skills workshops, share sustainability practices demonstrations with examples, offer classes and degrees in environmental sustainability, provide recycling training for small business and high schools, offer grant-writing workshops, and provide “Recycle Guy” training; and start community gardens fertility workshops, and programs to teach the public how to maintain gardens. The next steps the participants recommended were offering more seminars, developing school programs, and adding committees; offering educational venues for elected officials and staff; providing educational programs development; having field trips for children to connect with nature; and identifying internships for jobs. This in turn will lead to a cleaner environment; increased waste management and recycling; cleaner water availability; more biodiversity; and increased sustainability in county.

Business: This area addressed the opportunities and next steps the participants saw for businesses. The opportunities identified for the agricultural sector were business possibilities for ecotourism, increasing farmers markets, interest in the local food movement, potential for kitchen processing centers, and local food hubs at community colleges; increasing large scale community gardens, institutional purchasing of local food, and starting local fresh seafood markets; and increasing community supported agriculture. The tourism sector opportunities highlighted sustainability practices for parks, increasing biking and kayaking in the county, promoting green tourism, and becoming a more attractive target destination for area migration. The business and industry sector opportunities highlighted investing in green initiatives, learning about recycling, investing in energy management tools, managing carpooling programs, and providing information access through chamber initiatives. The next steps identified were to train a more knowledgeable labor force, meet the growing needs of employers, increase business and industry opportunities, build stronger collaborations, increase regional cooperation’s, and enhance public-private partnerships; turn landfills into greenhouses, modernize the energy grid, and increase purchasing power; more agricultural improvements, grow the number of farm-to-fork institutions, and expand biofuels production; increase energy assessments, reduce carbon footprint, and decrease energy bills. In other words more efficient facilities, more attractive businesses, and a greater widespread sustainability acceptance, accessibility, and competitiveness.

Communication: The participants identified this area as key for sustainability awareness and as a great opportunity to support the next steps. The sciences cluster opportunities suggested were marketing fish farms, and inviting speakers to share county needs, challenges and opportunities. The Business and industry cluster proposed collaboration among interested parties, public-private partnerships, and to include chamber meetings. The Governmental cluster suggested sustainability roving presentations as a venue to spread information. The

tourism cluster identified the best way to communicate was by age group that includes the 23 plus years and businesses with television ads, the web, seminars, and signage; the 11-22 year olds through social media, internet, web, and public service announcements (PSA) (at schools); and the one to ten year olds with PSA and promotional marketing items. The next steps cited were to develop communication exchanges, use focus groups, identify more scholarships, grow public awareness, break cultural barriers, use green billboards, and have sustainability events. As a result of better sustainability practices there will be a healthier population, a better quality of life, a connection between healthy nutritional eating habits and health problems, and a healthier and hopeful next generation.

Incentives: The participants identified the use of incentives as the trigger for sustainability investments businesses and individuals could use for training, workshops, and projects. The opportunities highlighted were learning how organizations are using grants, attending workshops on tax incentives and loans, identifying technology funding for commercialization and adoption, attending sustainability events, and for ensuring big farms sustainability; improving skills for fundraising, accessing and writing grants; training for private grants and donations, and identifying tax incentives; to celebrate sustainability accomplishments with individual awards; and to promote feasibility studies before big projects and research. The next step is to identify where the grant opportunities are for recycling, energy savings and sustainability practices; provide better and more sustainability awareness services; hold venues to improve infrastructure investment; and green building training to increase practices in the region.

Conclusion

The series of listening sessions held during February and March 2014 identified the need to build awareness of the benefits and challenges sustainability is currently facing in the region. There is a large need to inform the public of what sustainability is, how it impacts people, benefits and challenges facing businesses, how it impacts the communities they serve, and the cost and savings it can provide. How sustainability can be implemented will depend on the type of business, industry, or organization. The four clusters had common areas of interest that addressed energy and waste management, environmental impact, and the need for incentives to act. Educational sustainability training was highlighted as a need for the general public, schools, and businesses; therefore triggering an interest in obtaining access to a variety of training venues in sustainability. This information will assist SILC to identify and develop new programs, workshops, training opportunities, and events.

Acknowledgements

The listening sessions could not have been possible without the participation of organizations and individuals who dedicated their valuable time and effort to express their concerns and interests in this national and global emerging field of sustainability. Please accept our sincerest gratitude.

~Marilyn Graham, Coordinator SILC

APPENDIX I

Participants 2014 Sustainability Listening Sessions

Governmental

- Town of Holden Beach
- Brunswick County Planning Department
- Brunswick County Economic Development
- Brunswick Keep America Beautiful
- Waste Industries
- Cape Fear RC & D
- Town of Shallotte
- BCC-Physical Plant
- Audubon Society
- Real Estate
- Brunswick County Schools
- Town of Caswell Beach
- BCC-Customized Training
- BCC-Early Childhood
- Brunswick County Schools-Early College
- Cape Fear Solar Systems, BCC
- Concerned Citizen
- NC Waste Associates
- Cape Fear Community College-Sustainability program
- UNCW Environmental Health.

Tourism

- BCC-Continuing Education
- Brunswick Keep America Beautiful
- Carpet Cleaning PLUS
- North Brunswick Chamber of Commerce
- Natural Products
- BCC-Workforce Development
- Private Citizen
- Brunswick County Schools-Capital Projects and Planning
- Brunswick County Tourism Development Authority
- Brunswick County Health Department-Environmental Health
- Audubon Society
- BCC-Customized Training
- The Brunswick Beacon

- BCC-Economic and Workforce Development

Sciences

- Brunswick County Schools-Migrant Program
- USDA
- Brunswick Cooperative Extension
- Marine-Biotechnology Program-BCC
- Aquaculture Program-BCC
- BCC-LPN program
- BCC-Physical Plant-Grounds
- Horticulture/Turf Management-BCC
- Soil Scientist at Brunswick County Health Department
- Project Healthy Eating Intervention Lead
- Brunswick County Health Department
- Health Department intern
- Cape Fear Green Building Alliance
- Algonomics-BCC
- Healthcare-Workforce Development
- NC Southeastern Biotechnology Center
- B Leadership
- Yellow Wood Associates, Inc.
- Environmental/Farmer
- Lee Linear

Business and Industry

- Real Estate
- Brunswick Electric Membership Corporation
- Brunswick Electric Membership Corporation
- Atlantic Geoscience, Ltd.
- Lee Linear
- Small Business Center-BCC
- Brunswick County Schools
- BCC Workforce Development
- BCC-NCCER
- Lee Linear
- Hall & Wright Builders

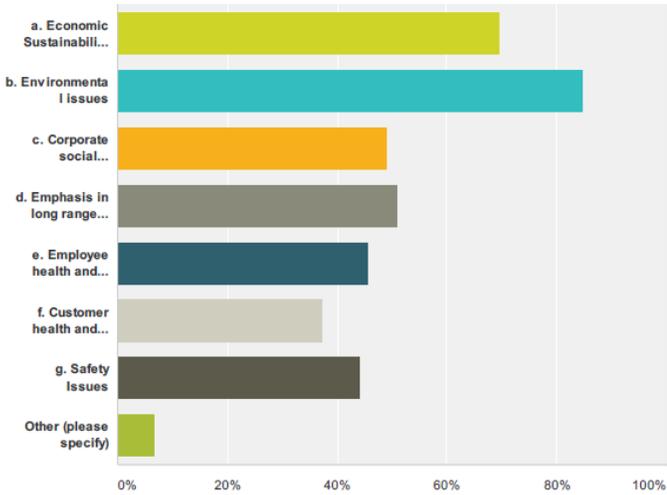
APPENDIX II

Sustainability Listening Session Knowledge

Survey Results-Part 1

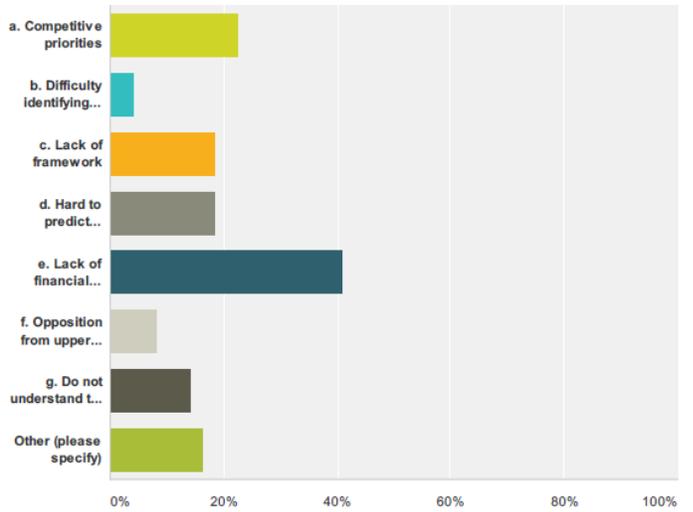
Q3 Which of the following do you associate with sustainability? (Check all that apply)

Answered: 59 Skipped: 0



Q4 What are the obstacles in your organization to evaluate the business case for sustainability? (Check all that apply)

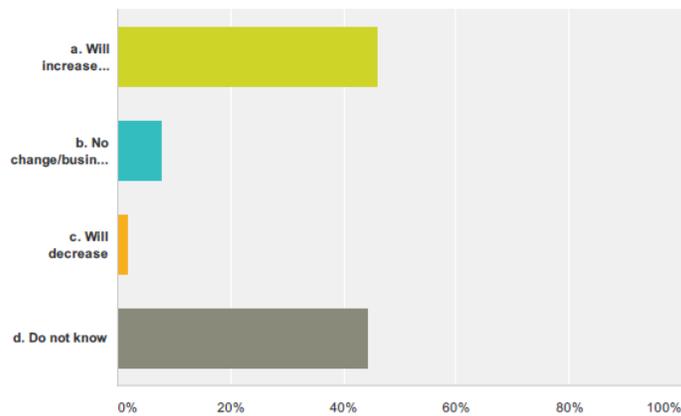
Answered: 49 Skipped: 10



Sustainability Listening Session Knowledge - Part 1

Q5 How do you expect your organization's commitment to sustainability to change in the next two years?

Answered: 52 Skipped: 7



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