

## Thurston-Mason Counties E3 Leadership Summit June 1, 2007

### Results of Session 4: Bridging the Gap Non-formal Education: Business/Workplace

The Business/Workplace participants were asked to comment on a series of goals for environmental education in Washington. This summary of their responses reflects both comments generated by participants as a group and comments submitted in writing by individual participants.

There were two Business/Workplace groups participating in this session.

**Meta Goal: For all businesses to access learning opportunities that foster their ability to operate in a sustainable manner**

In general, the participants appeared to accept this goal, but they seemed to think the emphasis should be on how adopting sustainable practices will make a business equal to or more competitive than those business that do not adopt these practices. Businesses are motivated to change more by the prospect of tangible benefits, than by concern for the environment.

**Revised meta goal:**

Educate businesses about sustainable practices and theory, and make the adoption of such practices more profitable. Demonstrate how a business can improve its performance by operating in a sustainable manner. Offer the support needed to implement best practices.

**Goal 1: Integrate outreach and technical assistance programs for businesses to simplify their participation and provide “one stop shopping” for improving the sustainability of their business practices.**

The participants agreed with this goal, but also voiced a number of questions and concerns:

**Observations and concerns:**

- The financial benefit for businesses must be demonstrated or they will not invest time or resources.
- Who will serve as the central coordinator of this information and assistance? It is not clear if this goal requires the creation of a new government agency or some other organization. It was also noted that the current regulations and legal jurisdictions of different government agencies might make this centralized coordination very difficult.

### **Suggestions:**

- A consultant might be necessary to help businesses learn about sustainable practices and make choices suited to their circumstances.
- Create a regularly updated environmental source book for businesses. This should outline the actions business owners can take to reduce both their costs and their impact on the environment. It should also list businesses that have achieved recognition for environmentally sound practices and point to the savings and other benefits they have experienced. The source book should also advertise annual awards for best practices.
- Conduct relevant research and provide the results (businesses do not have the time or resources to do this research themselves).

### **Goal 2: Provide incentives, financial and/or recognition, for businesses that strive to develop “green” practices.**

While the participants accepted this goal in general, they again emphasized the importance of financial incentives. Some thought recognition was important, but said it was secondary to the issue of cost and would not be sufficient by itself to motivate change. Subsidies, tax incentives, and other forms of funding were considered essential. Businesses also need to see that developing “green” practices will achieve tangible results, and that these results are both guaranteed and immediately apparent.

### **Additional suggestions:**

- Create a sense of urgency.
- Construct public policy and laws to act as incentives.
- Create a recognition program to increase the publicity and sense of competition among companies that choose to develop green business practices. Develop an annual report to highlight what various businesses are doing to work toward sustainability.
- Create state or national, publicly recognized green certification programs for business practices. Provide fast track review of permits for qualified green projects.
- Develop an advertising campaign to promote sustainability and include a list of businesses that have already embraced environmental practices. Develop and communicate a compelling case for sustainable practices, showing how they will promote long-term success and economic stability.
- Identify programs and incentives currently available.

### **Goal 3: Develop and promote a compelling case for the benefit of EE in helping businesses meet their workforce recruitment objectives and build their success.**

The response to this goal was mixed. Some thought it redundant because the meta goal essentially captures the same ideas. Others thought it out of place to help businesses recruit

employees, unless the real objective is a healthy economy capable of supporting both financial incentives and environmental education.

**Observations and concerns:**

- It is not clear who will be responsible for fulfilling this goal.

**Suggestions:**

- Environmental education success stories need to be gathered and communicated in order to make this case “compelling.”
- Research the recruitment objectives of various businesses. Human resources departments and talent development agencies might be useful resources.

**New Goals**

- Demonstrate how a business can improve its bottom line by operating in a sustainable manner, and offer the support needed to implement best practices.
- Hold conferences or meetings between environmental education stakeholders, business organizations, community members, and political leaders to facilitate communication between these different sectors, circulate information, and educate business people about the benefits of going green. Develop industry-specific presentations, and conduct surveys to monitor the impact of such presentations.
- Make environmental education accessible to business owners, who in turn can become educators themselves. Business owners not only have a unique opportunity to educate and discuss, they have a responsibility to do so.

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