Arizona State University
Tempe, Arizona
Environmental Education and Outreach

SCHOOL

Arizona State University, Tempe campus, public, 4-year, 72,254 students, Tempe, Arizona.

ABSTRACT

The Sustainable Cities Network (SCN) is a program designed to be a bridge between Arizona State University's (ASU) research and technical capabilities in sustainability and the front-line challenges facing cities. Decisions made today regarding land use, transportation, water, economic development, and social services will have enormous long-term impacts on the future sustainability of our "megapolitan" region. To strengthen regional sustainability efforts, ASU'S Global Institute of Sustainability (GIOS), along with city, county and tribal leaders established SCN in February 2009. The Network is a collaborative vehicle for sharing knowledge and coordinating efforts to understand and solve problems. It serves as a clearinghouse of best practices which cities can then apply to their unique problems and goals for environmental, social, and economic sustainability. Through the Network, partners work together to streamline and green city operations, advance solar and renewable energy, mitigate urban heat island, design sustainable neighborhoods, and secure water supplies in a changing climate. SCN is central to strengthening individual, community, and regional responses to environmental challenges through coordinated education, dialogue, and best practices implementation. The Network website can be found at http://sustainablecities.asu.edu.

GOALS AND OUTCOMES

Goals

The primary goal of the Network is to serve as a bridge between local communities and ASU and foster greater regional sustainability. The Network provides an effective venue to share knowledge and ideas, and encourage collaboration, keeping the lines of communication open between local communities and the university. Additional goals for the Network include the following:

- Enhancing and ensuring the sustainability of the region
- Sharing knowledge and coordinating efforts to solve local sustainability issues
- Fostering partnerships
- Identifying best practices, particularly those suitable for the arid/semi-arid (desert) environment
- Providing training and information
- Offering meaningful connections and collective learning opportunities
- Connecting ASU research with the front-line challenges of sustainability

Accomplishments and Outcomes

Although relatively new, the Network has been successful in working to achieve the aforementioned goals. In the beginning, SCN wanted to simply establish a solid rapport with local sustainability-related

municipal practitioners and "network" them together. Over time, other outcomes and goals were achieved which included:

- Providing educational and information meetings
- Creating a confidential sharing environment so members could discuss "the good, the bad and the ugly" when it comes to sustainability experiences and the all-important "lessons learned" out in the field
- Enabling communities to learn as a collective group, providing access to organizations and information they may not have otherwise. Examples of this include introductions and coordinated meetings with the U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) specific to EECBG grants/ARRA funding, EPA Region 9, and ICLEI – Local Governments for Sustainability.

As the Network is maturing, it recognizes the need to identify regional and collaborative opportunities that provide individual and regional community benefits. Topics of regional interest include Low Impact Development (LID) best practices specific to a desert environment, green infrastructure deployment, and form-based codes.

Several accomplishments should be noted for SCN. The Network, in partnership with three of the local communities (Phoenix, Mesa and Glendale), received a grant and held the first Regional Tree & Shade Summit on March 9, 2011. Over 225 people from the municipal, private and nonprofit sectors attended the Summit, initiating a regional discussion on the integration of green infrastructure, adoption of tree canopy goals, and the dissemination of best practices benefiting all the communities of the valley. Following the Summit, a SCN Green Infrastructure Workgroup was created to continue building on the interests and momentum of local jurisdictions. Grant funded certified arborist scholarships have been made available two years in a row so municipal and nonprofit employees can receive the necessary training and certifications needed to aid their local city's urban forestry efforts. The Regional Tree & Shade Summit received the prestigious Valley Forward Environmental Excellence Award of Merit for Environmental Education/Communication in the Public Sector in September 2011.

Also active in promoting solar and renewable energy, the Network released in January a Power Purchase Agreement template document that participating cities can use when starting a solar project. The Network is also a partner in the Arizona Rooftop Challenge, a $700,000+ grant received by the Arizona Governor's Office of Energy Policy (OEP) from the DOE powered by SunShot. This grant encourages the streamlining of processes for permitting, net metering and interconnection, financing, and planning and zoning. Streamlining processes will results in reduced costs; thus, encouraging more solar installations in the residential and small commercial sectors. The Network's role has been to connect community members and gain stakeholder input, both important components in the grant process.

The Network hosts regular workgroup meetings in the areas of Solar and Energy Efficiency, Water Resources, Green Infrastructure, Green Buildings, and Best Management Practices, bringing together

community members from various municipalities to share and discuss ideas. Two larger regional meetings are hosted each year profiling prominent speakers and encouraging additional networking and dialogue. To further bridge the gap between ASU and communities, SCN facilitates introductions between ASU research experts and city officials to help cities with unique sustainability challenges. In recognition for its outreach efforts, SCN recently received the ASU President's Award for Sustainability.

Challenges and Responses

Historically, valley cities have functioned independently based on the competition created for sales tax dollars. SCN promotes a collaborative participation model and ASU, as the convener, serves as a neutral facilitator eliminating much of the conflicts encountered in meetings. SCN has faced several challenges over the past several years. The economic downturn left municipal budgets reduced, resulting in staff reductions, department restructuring, the elimination of sustainability related positions, and reductions in available resources (travel budgets, programs dollars, materials, etc...). All too often the reductions in staff happen in the environmental and/or sustainability areas. That has reduced slightly the number of network participants; however, it becomes even more important and apparent during times of reductions for cities to collaborate and network based on these staff and resource reductions. The motto becomes "doing more with less" and how can we "borrow" ideas from other jurisdictions to make our budget go farther. In addition, as grant and foundation funding becomes more competitive, it proves even more important for cities to collaborate on regionally beneficial grant opportunities.

Another challenge faced by SCN is often working with community partners that are very different in size, demographic, and priority areas. Cities have a diverse set of interests, so it can be challenging to determine topics that are of interest to the majority of the participants. Finally, there can sometimes be conflicting opinions due to differing interests and priorities. SCN maintains a positive dialogue at meetings, finding that "common ground" for discussion and projects that will benefit most of the participating communities.

Campus Climate Action: Your School's Carbon Footprint

The Sustainable Cities Network does not directly influence ASU's carbon footprint; however, it does actively addresses climate change with its municipal participants and promotes carbon reduction activities, renewable energy and solar alternatives, and other sustainability practices. With a student/faculty population of over 70,000, ASU is similar to a small city. Its premier sustainability practices serve as excellent examples that can be mimicked by communities. Although SCN doesn't directly impact ASU's carbon footprint, it directly influences local jurisdictions through the sharing of its zero-waste, carbon neutrality, active engagement and principled practice goals and practices.

Commentary and Reflection
ASU, as well as other universities, are in a unique position to engage with local communities to influence and enhance local problem solving. SCN's model is not unusual and could be replicated in other metropolitan areas where multiple cities co-exist, but need assistance in moving forward with regional sustainability. The Network is an excellent program by which to improve outreach and education efforts with local practitioners and policy makers, while creating real opportunities and outcomes that can have lasting impacts.

ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT
Leaders and Supporters
Prior to the inaugural kick off of SCN in February 2009, it was an idea being nurtured by Dr. Rob Melnick, Executive Dean of GIOS to foster greater regional sustainability efforts. Additional GIOS staff including Brenda Shears, Jim Holway, Anne Ellis and Meredith Simpson, were instrumental in moving SCN from idea to concept. Anne Reichman was hired as the Program Manager in January 2009 to oversee the development of the program. The continuous support of GIOS for the program and the involvement of SCN with other ASU, GIOS and School of Sustainability faculty, students, programs and activities fully integrate SCN throughout the university and provide more opportunities for city-university engagement.

Instrumental and key to SCN's success is the active participation of local cities, towns and tribal communities. A Steering Committee comprised of ten municipal sustainability practitioners was created to provide direction to the program. The original cities involved in the Committee included Chandler, El Mirage, Glendale, Maricopa, Mesa, Peoria, Phoenix, Scottsdale, and Tempe. Since its inception, city participants have changed slightly and now include the participation of Maricopa County. Over the past 3 years, SCN membership has increased from the original 10 communities to now include over 25 cities and towns in the Phoenix Metro area, Maricopa County, three tribal communities and over 15 additional cities throughout Arizona including Flagstaff and Tucson.

The leadership and support of valley mayors, city council members, and department heads has been critical to SCN's success thus far. The buy-in and participation of the "higher ups" in city management allows city practitioners to participate more easily (and frequently) in the network, and to expend resources on SCN meetings, activities, programs and grant opportunities.

Funding and Resources
The Network program is funded within ASU GIOS' outreach and education budget. The program manager's salary is funded by GIOS. Additional funds for activities, regional meetings, workshops, and similar programs are obtained and funded through various private and public sector grants. Grant funds help cover costs associated with regional meetings, workshops, workgroup meetings and other related expenses. GIOS and the participating cities generously donate and/provide meeting space and employee time. The Network was not supported by an NWF Campus Ecology Fellowship.

Education and Community Outreach
Education and outreach are two of the primary pillars on which the Network was created. It strives to build lasting relationships with its diverse set of communities around the Phoenix Metro area and Arizona. Through its regularly scheduled workgroup meetings, topic-specific workshops, grant activities, and bi-annual regional meetings, SCN provides continuous opportunities to educate and reach out to communities. In addition, weekly emails provide updates on local, regional and national events; grants;

webinars; topic specific information, and much, much more. SCN website, http://sustainablecities.asu.edu, provides ongoing access to SCN, ASU and GIOS information.

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MORE ABOUT YOUR SCHOOL
Campus Sustainability History
The Global Institute of Sustainability evolved from more than 30 years of environmental research conducted by the Center for Environmental Studies at Arizona State University (ASU). The institute conducts research, education and problem solving related to sustainability, with a special focus on urban environments. Within the Global Institute of Sustainability, there is a University Sustainability Practices group. This group of several individuals is dedicated to oversee campus sustainability. We initiate and coordinate sustainability efforts of several campus community groups and stakeholders. University Sustainability Practices has established four goals for campus sustainability. 1) Carbon Neutrality, 2) Zero Waste, 3) Active Engagement and 4) Principled Practice. We have established several sustainability initiatives to help the university achieve these four goals. http://sustainability.asu.edu/

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