

Sustainability Round Table Report 2007

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By Kendra Sandoval and Janna Six

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado
www.sustainablecolorado.org

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I. Summary

Alliance for Sustainable Colorado facilitated round table meetings as a way of bringing non-profit activists, community leaders, business people, government agency representatives and educators together from around the state and the nation for dialogues on sustainability.

Five sustainability round table dialogues were conducted during the Fall of 2007. Over a hundred people from Colorado attended one of the meetings in Telluride, Colorado Springs, Durango or Denver. Five people from other states attended the national meeting, also held in Denver.

The meetings confirmed the Alliance's views that sustainability is a universal, salient and urgent concern. Accomplishments along the path to sustainability vary widely by community – based on a variety of factors such as the lack of communication infrastructure to local government leadership and funding. The round tables opened our eyes to the myriad of successful and frustrated efforts by organizations and individuals. And, they clarified ways our efforts can be strengthened, supported and coalesced to move sustainability forward.

This report explores the goals of the round tables, identifies the indicators of sustainability, identifies strategies for addressing those indicators and includes recommendations for Alliance for Sustainable Colorado's future role. Incorporated is a general description of the round table format including the World Café guidelines and finally the case studies from around the state. An appendix includes lists of attendees and an entire compilation of notes from all round tables.

Two assumptions were made at the beginning of each round table discussion. First, a definition of sustainability was presented by Alliance staff to ensure that all participants were in general agreement of the end goal. The definition offered is that "sustainability is universal economic, social and environmental well-being." There was no disagreement. Second, the focus of the meetings was on solutions that promote sustainability. Problems and behaviors considered "unsustainable" were understood and only discussed incidentally.

This report collects a sampling of thoughts about sustainability. Future round tables will be conducted more broadly throughout Colorado and nationally.

II. Goals for the round tables

- Build cross-sector alliances (business, non-profit, government and academia) to share best practices and find ways to collaborate
- Share news on existing sustainability initiatives
- Brainstorm ideas for new sustainability initiatives at the regional, state and/or national level
- Explore effective use of existing community resources (money, people and relationships) to build momentum
- Build communication networks and collaborative activities that will support the sustainability movement
- Nationally, identify organizations interested in establishing (or expanding to become) the primary state-based alliance in their state

III. Indicators of sustainability in Colorado (Overall round table themes)

- Food is produced and consumed locally
- Renewable, clean energy and energy efficiency are required
- Water conservation is employed in all arenas
- A coordinated and functioning mass transit system is built and utilized
- Sustainable behaviors and habits at the individual and collective level are learned and practiced
- Recycling and composting are mandatory

IV. Strategies for reaching those indicators (Best practices and themes which emerged)

Successful strategies should:

- Provide incentives, not punishments
- Apply system thinking in all work
- Focus on youth
- Bring people together from diverse points of view to communicate on the values we have in common – open space, healthy environment and high quality of life
- Use global warming as the galvanizing issue for change
- Focus on the emotional, cultural and spiritual aspects of sustainability
- Avoid politicizing sustainability issues
- Take action to build regional capacity
- Level the playing field so there is a financial incentive to take the correct action in relation to water, energy, transportation and all resource use
- Incorporate triple bottom line thinking in all decision making

V. Successful strategies would include

- Watershed education programs
- Complementary currencies
- Education in calculating your carbon footprint
- Well-maintained and functioning communication networks
- Better promotion and replication of best practices and technologies we are already using
- More effectively publicizing common messages
- Local governments taking active leadership in sustainability
- State governments connecting regional efforts by providing infrastructure and modeling leadership
- State governments supporting local governments in sustainability planning, funding and action

VI. Recommendations for the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado's role in moving sustainability forward in Colorado in a collaborative way

- Expand Alliance website – comprehensive resource for sustainability
- Create traveling systems thinking speaker series
- Facilitate periodic web conferences
- Continue regular check-ins with the current sustainability network
- Expand network by holding round table meetings in other areas throughout the state
- Create an action agenda that we can all work on together to make a tangible improvement in the quality of life in Colorado

VII. Recommendations for Alliance for Sustainable Colorado's role in moving sustainability forward Nationally in a collaborative way

- Facilitate periodic web conferences
- Design a comprehensive web resource for sustainability
- Provide support in creating a statewide center
- Visit sites in other states to ground truth the issues
- Share model language for sustainability legislation
- Create a national steering committee for a state-based sustainability movement

VIII. General description of round tables

- Four statewide round tables were held throughout Colorado between October 27 and November 15, 2007
- These meetings reached 106 people (including Alliance staff)
- One national round table was held in Denver, Colorado, attracting 5 representatives from 3 neighboring states
- Notes were taken on posters, video tape and by hand

IX. World Café procedure – (discussions were facilitated by Kendra Sandoval and Janna Six of the Alliance for Sustainable Colorado, questions changed as the round tables progressed)

- Participants were divided into small groups of 3-5 at each table
- Answers to questions were orally shared with each other
- Instructions were given to write on table, color, doodle, draw, share and listen
- Emerging themes were determined
- Small group reported back to larger group
- One person stayed at the table and the rest of the group moved to a new table
- The process was repeated with a second question
- The process was repeated with a third question that stimulated participants to network and take action

X. Case studies - the following themes stood out from extensive notes recorded from dialogue sessions at each round table (please see attached for full set of notes from posters and discussions)

A. Telluride - October 27, 2007

Description:

The Telluride region is nestled high in the magnificent, breathtaking San Juan Mountains in the southwestern corner of Colorado. The area boasts of natural alpine beauty, a rich historical Victorian heritage, an abundance of activities and recreation, cultural celebrations and festivals, outdoor adventures and the sophistication of world-renowned skiing. The round table was held during the off-season, so the community was very quiet. A collaborative meeting was already being convened by local organizations; the New Community Coalition, the Telluride Institute and Sheep Mountain Alliance. The round table discussion was facilitated by Alliance for Sustainable Colorado staff.

Participants:

Nineteen people attended. The attendees knew each other and already had a good sense of community. Most were high level representatives from non-profit organizations within a 100- mile radius, from Durango, Paonia and Norwood. Two people from the local Colorado State University Cooperative Extension offices attended. A teacher and two students from Colorado Mountain College observed the meeting. The participants were very knowledgeable and passionate about sustainability.

Sustainability Discussion Themes:

Question 1: *What have you done to move sustainability forward in your organization and your community? **and** What sustainable practices have worked best for you, your organization and your community?*

- Bridge the gaps between communities – cross pollination, reach past the choir, reach non-traditional audiences
- Focus on education – public education, self education and changing behaviors
- Use systems theory, interconnected thinking to describe issues
- Take the role of being a catalyst – energize large bodies of people
- Provide incentives for behavior change, not punishments

Question 2: *What initiatives could our organizations work on together to accelerate sustainability throughout Colorado?*

- Institutionalize greener building codes
- Revise Tabor – to allow Colorado government agencies to collect necessary fees to provide public services
- Reform K-12 education to include sustainability
- Teach systems thinking – educate people about interconnectedness

Question 3: *As we work on sustainability what does engaging business, government, non-profits, academia and the public look like? and What does continued collaboration look like?*

- Find something that we all have in common to work on – clean air? watershed?
- Expand the network by identifying all relevant stakeholders
- Provide mechanisms for ongoing dialogue, discussions, such as newsletters and bi-weekly check-ins
- Present concrete opportunities for people to take action

Question 4: *What resources do we need? and What bold steps can we take to meeting these resource needs?*

- Enlist Governor's support for regional projects by touring the state and funding infrastructure to appoint regional sustainability coordinators
- Create continuity and predictability of institutional support for resource extraction, development and use
- Make corporations more accountable to the public
- Build state leadership to amend Tabor
- Have and tell the same story, our messages are too diffuse.
- Keep resource base undated (who's doing what/ contact info)
- Create local sustainable jobs

Unique issues to this region:

- Greenbucks program – complementary currency (In the summer of 2006 over 450 community volunteers cleaned up local lands and waters and learned about stewardship of the ecosystem). Volunteers earned Greenbucks which they traded for regional discounts and concert tickets
- Carbon calorie class- teaching how to calculate carbon footprint
- Watershed education project for the San Miguel River basin that offers comprehensive, hands-on training
- New Community Coalition, is a model 501c3 organization designed to promote sustainability and is a collaboratively sponsored and managed project of Mountain Village, Telluride and San Miguel County
- Isolation from Front Range people and resources is an obstacle to successful policy action
- Energy sheds – a new way of looking at local activism and interconnectedness

B. Colorado Springs – October 31, 2007

Description:

Fort Carson initiated its journey toward sustainability with a regional conference in 2002, where Fort Carson and community stakeholders established 25-year goals. Fort Carson has long been an Army model of environmental stewardship and has an established history of community involvement. A sustainability approach was a logical next step at Fort Carson. Operating in a sustainable fashion goes beyond compliance, saves money and considers the well-being of everyone on the post and in the community, now and in the future. Colorado Springs is home to the “great political divide.” Military and government influence here sets an example for other sectors. The Army is walking its talk. It’s a good model of sustainability not just in its verbiage but also through actions from green buildings – procurement. The Alliance World Café was part of a two-day Fort Carson Sustainability Conference.

Participants:

Over 50 people participated, including influential community leaders, all living within a hundred mile radius, representing business, government, non-profit and academic sectors.

Sustainability Discussion Themes:

Question 1: *What sustainable practices have worked best to move sustainability forward in your organization and your community?*

- Working with youth
- Encourage water conservation through: tiered prices, storm water enterprise program, reduce impervious surfaces, education program (Fountain Valley Healthy Initiative), purchase of water rights and reuse of water
- Conserve energy through: rebates from utility companies and incentives, education on impacts of energy resources and global warming and energy audit of all city facilities

Question 2: *What initiatives could our organizations work on together to accelerate sustainability throughout Colorado?*

- Form partnerships and create common goals
- Use existing models of success: don’t reinvent the wheel
- Publicize successful efforts and best practices
- Create a “come to work with government” day
- Coordinate regional efforts to enable Front Range mass transit, recycling and composting

Question 3: *What bold steps can we take to reach existing community resources to build momentum?*

- Convene a central meeting to demonstrate critical mass
- Practice sustainability education that is non-partisan

- Maintain common web site where people can go for information around the state

Unique topics to this region:

- Safe routes to school
- Incentives to use mass transit
- United Nations decade for sustainability education

C. Durango – November 10, 2007

Description:

Durango is nestled in the Animas River Valley surrounded by the San Juan Mountains. The Animas River runs through downtown and boasts gold medal fly-fishing waters and is very popular for whitewater rafting, kayaking and canoeing. Durango is an outdoor activity paradise for hiking; snow skiing, mountain biking, road biking, backpacking, rock climbing, hunting, off-roading and golfing. Durango is the home of Fort Lewis College. Population of the county is about 20,000 and growing rapidly with vacation homes.

Participants:

Southwest Association for a Sustainable Colorado (SASCO) convened the networking meeting it called “Green Umbrella Event”. Fifty one representatives from non-profit, government, business, academia and faith based organizations attended. Dick White, local resident and former professor at Smith College, was one of two featured speakers; Janna Six from Alliance for Sustainable Colorado was the other speaker.

Sustainability Discussion Themes:

Question 1: *What does sustainability mean to me? My organization?*

- A change in consciousness. Everything being done should be guided by the precautionary principle
- A sense of urgency
- Interlocking issues
- Shared community vision statement of sustainability – recognition of diverse values and principles
- Do planning on a regional scale -- building regional capacity
- Problem solving structures in place

Question 2: *How can we communicate and collaborate to become a more sustainable community?*

- Resolve the tension about whether to focus on expanding the choir or reaching out to the non-choir
- Need to have a central calendar because duplication of efforts is causing similar mission driven organizations in Durango to compete for customers and resources
- SASCO could consider the possibility of hiring a Sustainability Coordinator
- Audit the local government budget with a sustainability filter
- Have state legislation fund offices / networks for sustainability hubs throughout the state
- Collaborate more broadly - don't just stay focused on your narrow interest
- Determine how your issue connects with others
- Ask groups to sign onto a statement of commitment to promote sustainability?

Question 3: *How can we facilitate collaboration on sustainability? Next steps?*

- As part of the next meeting we have to: prioritize, define, delegate/volunteer action items
- Engage and empower youth
- Promote voter registration and get out the vote
- Get involved with local government Policy/Procedure Process & Budget
- Create a central phone # /web page/WIKI/hotline to ask questions - interactive idea seed bank via website and example would be an “Information Clearing House/Resource Center”
- Provide a monthly, quarterly or seasonal “social” invite targeted organizations and representatives to become involved to expand the network
- Educate groups - start with systems, then break down into topic areas, close by returning to systems integration

Unique topics to this region:

- Promote local food to school program
- Create a list of sustainability principles for organizations to sign on to
- Develop and promote a common appreciation of what it means to live in Durango – cultural spiritual heritage

D. Front Range – November 15, 2007

Description:

Special ½ day meeting convened just for the purpose of a Front Range round table sponsored by Alliance for Sustainable Colorado held at the Alliance Center in Denver, Colorado

Participants:

Eighteen people participated (including four people by speaker phone) business, non-profit, government and academic sectors were represented

Sustainability Discussion Themes:

Question 1: *What sustainable practices have worked best to move sustainability forward in your organization and your community?*

- Connect young people to coalition efforts
- Promote single stream recycling
- Be active listeners, speak in simple terms
- Build a culture of sustainability values and ethics that intertwine with all aspects of business and life = shift paradigms
- Institute policy that promotes leadership with minimum regulation

Question 2: *Looking ahead, what bold steps is your organization considering?*

- Make recycling and composting mandatory
- Educate about sustainability for all languages
- Change the indicators of progress or wealth of a society for low income people
- Reinstate net metering to be a Federal policy
- Increase collaboration with all groups, not just like-minded groups
- Make the environment a non-partisan issue
- Shift “I” paradigm to “We”
- Track carbon foot printing

Question 3: *What initiatives could our organizations work on together to accelerate sustainability throughout Colorado?*

- De-politicize the movement
- Make connections with uncommon partners
- Reinvent communities with models such as urban agriculture
- Train children and young people in sustainability
- Create easy to access sustainability resource website
- Catalyze to create an umbrella organization that speaks with a common voice
- Generate policies which control sprawl and improve building codes

Unique topics to this region:

- Green Gorillas is a name for people who have been green in their own lives for years and are coming out in support of sustainable practices at their work places
- Interdependence vs. independence (looking at the importance of interconnectedness)
- Involving agricultural sector (USDA, Livestock Association and Farm Bureau) in processes of carbon sequestration

E. National Round Table in Denver - November 29-30, 2007

Description:

The National round table was held at the Alliance Center in Denver - a day and a half meeting engaging people in conversation from four states. Meeting included Alliance Center monthly brown bag lunch, introductions to organizations represented tour of the Alliance Center, dinner and networking, world café and dialogue session.

Participants:

Ten people participated. Two people from Oklahoma, two from Nebraska, one from Missouri, one from Denver and four from Alliance for Sustainable Colorado.

Sustainability Discussion Themes:

Question 1: *Please share a success story, highlighting the best practices that moved sustainability forward in your organization and community.*

- Waste=food (model of Cradle to Cradle)
- Continued partnership with Lafarge Cement to shred plastic
- Connecting with and speaking to the right people to move sustainability forward
- Modeling everyone is a leader and leading by example
- CASBA – Colorado Alliance of Sustainable Business Associations
- Having models that incorporate diversity and other sectors
- Implementing community based social marketing
- Submitting joint grant requests so as not to re-invent the wheel

Question 2: *Please share a story about barriers you've encountered.*

- Insufficient publicity/communication
- Good news and processes or results not being reported
- Limited sharing between “green” organizations
- Policy and bureaucracy – cutting through red tape
- Regional chapters becoming autonomous because there are not enough people at the statewide level to support infrastructure change
- Lacking intergenerational communication
- Fear
- The issue is SO BIG and encompassing. Where do we start?
- Not seeing our own blind spots
- No platform for feedback
- Lack of strategic planning in overall statewide vision, local government goals vs. state government goals

Question 3: *Looking ahead, what bold steps is your organization considering? What initiatives could our organizations work on together to accelerate sustainability nationally?*

- We could create an educational tour on systems thinking and connections and get rid of territorial competition
- Establishing an internet location where green organizations can post events/items that are going on which would communicate with all non-profits
- Create CASBA in other states – i.e. OASBA (Oklahoma), NASBA (Nebraska), MASBA (Missouri), or RASBA (Regional) - Develop a paid staff and paid membership for OASBA

Unique topics to this region:

- Let's not get caught up in the minutia
- Work with Native tribes in Oklahoma and elsewhere
- Reach millions instead of hundreds
- Extreme sense of urgency
- A national website for sustainability organizations is needed
- Conference call to check in every couple of months
- We must unite the body politic