
Framework for Community Sustainability

Ten Ingredients for Long-Term Success

As part of an emerging and creative worldwide trend, decision-makers in a variety of communities are linking their local economy, their community, and the environment. Instead of deciding which will prevail—economy, community, or environment—they understand that each is a leg supporting the stool of community success. They're seeking ways to strengthen all three. Sometimes these efforts toward sustainable communities start with elected leaders, sometimes with businesses, and sometimes with grassroots citizen advocacy. The strongest are built on support from all three sectors—public, private, and nonprofit.

A review of many of these efforts reveals ten ingredients of smart and sustainable governance, summarized below:

1. **Genuine collaboration** among leaders of all community sectors and people from all walks of life ensures better solutions informed by more perspectives, plus broad support for results. Proceeding through every stage of policy- and decision-making, collaboration is most effective when it evolves into a diverse coalition committed to the community's vision and plan.
2. Develop and publicize a community goals or **vision** statement that sets forth economic, environmental, and community goals. This statement provides guidance to leaders who are often pulled in conflicting directions by a wide range of opinions on many local issues. Eventually, businesses and nonprofit groups can mold their respective mission statements to make them compatible with the community's vision and plan.
3. Develop and publish **indicators of progress** toward each of the goals in the vision statement. Economic, environmental, and community indicators may include such wide-ranging issues as industry trends, water quality, newborn birth weight, and housing affordability. Indicators can become the method by which the community determines its progress toward sustainability. They can be the factual basis for important community decisions.
4. Develop and adopt **decision-making tools and methods** that ensure consideration of all elements of the vision statement, including the community, the economy and the environment—whether the decision is being made by public, private, or nonprofit sectors. These tools and methods benefit both decision-makers and the public. They make complex

issues easier to understand and they disclose the basis upon which decisions are made. They include intensive workshops, matrices, criteria and indicators.

5. **Take Action:** In order to achieve the goals set forth in the vision statement, choose projects and programs that actively strengthen the local economy, nurture the community, and restore the environment. Collaboratively use the community's decision-making tools to select the projects. For a list of sustainable development projects and have worked in other communities, consult one of Rocky Mountain Institute's companion texts: "Building Community Prosperity" or "Grappling with Growth."

6. Foster **community entrepreneurship:** To implement many community projects, employ the business skills and tools of such organizations as co-operatives, community development corporations, land trusts, community stock corporations, development authorities, special purpose districts, and micro-credit lending institutions.

7. Organize a **business network** to share information, ideas, and techniques for more sustainable and successful business, to educate the public, and to influence local government to eliminate barriers to sustainable business practices.

8. Establish a community **sustainability plan** or better, integrate sustainability into your existing plans. A community, often supported by its local governments, can build on its vision by adopting specific objectives, action items, policies, guidelines, and regulations, all of which can take the form of a formal plan.

9. Employ **continuous learning:** Revisit major decisions and actions at predetermined dates following implementation. Central to the establishment of a learning community, this practice determines if actions achieve their intended objectives, and considers new actions based on this feedback. It minimizes unintended consequences. A community that has already identified indicators of sustainability has a sound basis for determining the effects of decisions, and for continuous internal feedback and improvement.

10. Foster **leadership and civic capacity:** Through training, events, and organizations, commit local resources to helping existing leaders understand new ideas and creative ways of making decisions. Also, nurture and train the next generation of leaders. And for creative advice and support, hire planners and managers who have experience with new ideas and rapid change.

Your community should not hesitate to take concrete action (#5) before all these pieces are in place. However, *long-term* success requires building community capacity. Therefore, develop the other listed ingredients in order to integrate sustainability into the fabric of community decision-making, and to achieve your community's full potential.