

## *Environmentally Sustainable Practices to Achieve Community Development Goals*

Anchor institutions can implement environmentally conscientious and sustainable, or “green,” practices not only as a part of their community development strategies but also as a means of achieving them. Environmentally sustainable efforts accomplish a myriad of goals beyond just reducing the carbon footprint of the institution; they create healthier environments for employees and community alike, cut consumption costs, and address local hiring and purchasing goals. Sourcing goods locally stimulates the local economy while reducing transportation costs, both monetary and environmental. Similarly, developing new green infrastructure for the institution and in the community – such as new green technologies, alternative local energy sources, recycling systems and built environment retrofitting – creates new jobs locally and encourages business development and growth. More efficient use of resources through new green development further reduces cost and ensures institutional security.

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*Sustainable practices not only reduce the carbon footprint of an institution, but also create healthier environments, cut costs, and meet local hiring and purchasing goals*

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Developing green initiatives in collaboration with local community groups and leaders will ensure that anchor institution strategies address actual community need and work to create real and long-lasting improvements for community residents. Anchor institutions can partner with local community organizations to provide training programs, educational opportunities and hands-on workshops in green development or lend their expertise in green programs to building developments and rehabilitations.

### **Making it Work**

As mentioned above, implementing green strategies is most effective when seen as an integral part of a broader community development approach. Anchor institutions can influence broader environmental improvements if they recognize the impact of more sustainable institutional practices on the community and use community partnerships to directly improve outcomes for the community. Integrating environmentally sustainable practices into institutional planning at all levels – from procurement policies to incentive structures – makes it easier for an institution to realize green goals while addressing existent community need. Here are a few steps that institutions can take to realize a green agenda:

- Develop sustainability as an expressed institutional goal and integrate it into institutional planning at all levels.
- Design green initiatives and strategies in collaboration with community groups to address real community need.
- Offer green job training programs, educational opportunities and workshops in partnership with local community groups.
- Lend green development expertise to residential and commercial development projects.
- Invest directly, or through loan programs, in local, environmentally sustainable small businesses.

## **Best Practices**

### *Syracuse University*

In 1998, Syracuse University opened its Center of Excellence (SyracuseCoE) “to create innovations in environmental and energy technologies that improve human health and productivity, security, and sustainability in urban and built environments.” SyracuseCoE has an expressed goal of creating jobs and wealth in upstate New York and supports community collaborations through its Center for Sustainable Community Solutions (CSCS). CSCS works closely with local government, community organizations, state agencies, and academic institutions to train leaders and create sustainable community. Building rehabilitation is one of SyracuseCoE’s premier programs and has resulted in home renovation using sustainable green technology such as rain gardens and super-insulated walls, and the redevelopment of warehouses into mixed-use facilities that including a green technology incubator and artist live-work space. These efforts are aimed at restoring the residential and commercial vibrancy of the neighborhood in keeping with community values and culture.

### *Gundersen Lutheran Health System*

Gundersen Lutheran has long been committed to the health of its communities, and includes environmental and economic sustainability in its definition of “health.” They use a “two-sided” green principle, which requires community solutions to have a positive environmental impact while reducing costs for patients and the health system. In 2008, Gundersen developed a sustainability plan called Envision to achieve environmental leadership in the areas of energy and waste management, recycling, and sustainable building design. Envision’s goal is to be able to meet 100 percent of the institution’s energy needs through renewable energy projects and increases in energy efficiency by 2014. To do this, Gundersen has adjusted its purchasing and supply chain to reflect its “two-sided” green principle and actively works to encourage local economic growth and development through setting local purchasing goals, developing local alternative energy sources and helping found a multi-stakeholder food cooperative. Additionally, Gundersen has rehabilitated old buildings into affordable housing, built environmentally friendly infrastructure improvements and offered financial incentives for local homeownership. The largest employer and most significant economic engine in the region, Gundersen’s commitment to local sustainability has had a great effect on the surrounding communities.

## **Resources**

Syracuse University, Center of Excellence, <http://www.syracusecoe.org/coe/index.html>

Gundersen Lutheran, Envision Plan, <http://www.gundluth.org/?id=583&sid=1>