



*“We thrive and survive on planet earth as a single human family.
And one of our main responsibilities is to leave to successor
generations a sustainable future.”*

Former UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan

The Global Context

Sustainability is the greatest challenge of our time. The scientific evidence is overwhelming and undeniable: climate change presents very serious global risks, and it demands an urgent global response. Ecosystems around the world are in decline and the ability of the earth to provide life-supporting systems is being systematically eroded.¹ Around the world, one-fifth of the world's population goes to bed hungry on any given night and 1.2 billion people (mostly women) continue to live in abject poverty.² Globally, societies are realizing that industrial progress and growth as we have known it have social, economic, and environmental costs that can no longer be ignored, and that there are ecological and social limits to growth. The sustainability challenge is about ensuring prosperity and wellbeing for this generation and the generations to come, while living within those limits.

Recent polls show that Canadians have put the environment at the top of their list of priorities. Governments at all levels are debating the best way to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and ensure a healthy environment for future generations. The media has put sustainability on the front pages and public interest has never been stronger. Canadians want action. They want to do the right thing. But the challenge is enormously complex.

¹ United Nations, Millennium Ecosystem Assessment.

² Oxfam Canada, “Hungry for Change.” Available at <http://www.oxfam.ca/hungryforchange/index.htm>. Accessed 13 October, 2006.



Sustainability cannot be achieved by one organization – one company, one municipality, one government – alone. It is a challenge that requires unprecedented collaboration between departments, between sectors, between levels of government, and at all levels of civil society. New organizations and new ways of thinking are needed to allow us to move beyond our own disciplines and areas of expertise to collaborate with others.

Meeting the challenge of sustainability requires systems thinking – examining how different systems are linked to one another, and how our own actions affect those systems; understanding the ways we have undermined the systems that support us; and focusing on how we can address those problems upstream, before they become serious, rather than looking only at impacts downstream.

The Natural Step

While there is broad agreement on the concept and need for sustainability, there has thus far been no systemic, practical path or method for how to achieve the goal. The Natural Step Framework provides a tested, practical approach that can be used to build on this interest and advance toward a sustainable future.

The Natural Step Framework is being used by hundreds of organizations around the world to advance sustainability and facilitate cross-sectoral collaboration. The Natural Step Framework provides three essential ingredients for meaningful progress toward sustainability:

1. A **shared language** for sustainability
2. A rigorous, science-based **understanding of sustainability** rooted in systems thinking
3. A proven strategic **planning process** to help decision-makers translate that understanding into practice.

“The whole world has dreamt about a solid definition of sustainability that would allow systematic step-by-step planning. When the definition arrived, delivered by The Natural Step, it was remarkable to see how simple it was. Why hadn’t anybody thought about it before?”

Paul Hawken, Natural Capitalism

It is important to note that adoption of The Natural Step does not replace or contradict any other tool, concept or method designed to advance sustainability. Instead, it provides a structured way to understand and approach sustainability, and an integrated planning framework and set of guiding principles to strengthen existing initiatives and encourage greater collaboration.



The Atlantic Canada Sustainability Initiative

A grass-roots network of municipalities, businesses and NGOs is interested in developing a regional initiative in Atlantic Canada to use the Natural Step Framework as a common planning framework to better understand the challenges and opportunities of sustainability and to move the region toward sustainable solutions. United by a common vision of a sustainable Atlantic Canada, and a common commitment to action, these organizations want to engage other communities, other businesses, and other levels of government and to create a broad-based network which becomes a tipping point for greater sustainability in the region.

The Atlantic Context

The four Atlantic Provinces, while distinct from each other, together have many unique features which make the Atlantic Canadian region particularly suitable for piloting a proven method of advancing sustainable development. Governments, communities, and businesses in Atlantic Canada are already thinking about sustainability. Provincial governments have begun to incorporate sustainable development concepts into their policies and planning. Communities in the Atlantic region, such as Wolfville, Halifax, Saint John, and Antigonish, have begun to implement their own sustainability initiatives. The business sector is also beginning to embrace the concept of sustainable development, and some Atlantic Canadian businesses have taken significant steps down the road to sustainability. There is growing interest in sustainability from all sectors, and recognition of the need to take action in order to ensure long-term prosperity.

The Atlantic Sustainability Initiative could be extraordinarily beneficial for the Atlantic Canadian region as a whole, as it becomes known nationally and internationally as an exemplary case of regional movement towards sustainability. The systematic application of The Natural Step framework in Atlantic Canada could attract enormous interest, generate remarkable export opportunities, and provide a competitive advantage for the region as sustainable practices of necessity become the norm.

The special features of Atlantic Canada, such as local community economies, a relatively small population, extraordinary natural beauty, and small, manageable provincial entities, are particular advantages in sustainable systems, and indicate that the region already has many of the assets required to become a model of socially, environmentally, and economically responsible development. What is needed now is the right framework, the right leaders, and adequate resources to help the region move forward.



The Proposed Program

Objectives

This initiative will be a first step in an ongoing commitment and journey towards a more sustainable future in Atlantic Canada. Project partners commit to the following objectives:

- **build capacity and competence** within their organization to become better leaders in sustainable development
- **implement a plan of action** that advances sustainability within their organization through concrete actions
- **serve as role models** by sharing their own organization's successes and lessons with respect to sustainability
- **build an effective network** that collaborates and supports progress towards sustainability
- **build regional momentum** towards sustainability by engaging citizens, organizations and governments within the Atlantic Region
- **identify and act on opportunities** collaboratively to help move the region towards sustainability

Milestones

- May 14-16, 2007: First training and networking workshop
- May – November 2007: individual organizational homework assignments and coaching with TNS Canada; peer-to-peer learning among partners; ongoing communications and networking.
- November 13-14, 2007: Interim workshop to share successes, assess progress, and encourage interest in new participants
- November 2007 – April 2008: individual organizational homework assignments and coaching with TNS Canada; peer-to-peer learning among partners; ongoing communications and networking.
- April 17-18, 2008: a regional sustainability summit will be convened where the partners share their results, both internally with the group and externally with the public and with other key organizations and leaders.

For a full description of the program, please Appendix 3.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Founding partners
- Appendix 2 – Sustainability Partners
- Appendix 3 – Description of Initiative and outcomes
- Appendix 4 – Project Timeline



Appendix 1 – Founding Organizations

The Natural Step Canada

The Natural Step Canada is part of an international non-profit organization that works with various groups ranging from municipal governments to large multi-national corporations who are committed to understanding and integrating sustainable development into their day-to-day work. The mission of The Natural Step as an organization is to develop a genuine commitment to, and competence in, sustainable development throughout society, using The Natural Step Framework as a systems approach for dialogue and decision making.

Genuine Progress Index (GPI) Atlantic

Founded in 1997, GPI Atlantic is an independent, non-profit research and education organization committed to the development of the Genuine Progress Index (GPI) – a new measure of sustainability, wellbeing and quality of life. Our mission is to conduct research on the GPI, and to assist leaders in business, government and communities in using the GPI perspective in their decision-making.

Nova Scotia Environmental Network

The purpose of the Nova Scotia Environmental Network (NSEN) is to provide support for its members, environmental non-governmental organizations in the province, in their efforts to achieve their goals by facilitating information exchange and by providing a medium for coordinated action plans.



Appendix 2 –Sustainability Partners

The following organizations and communities have signed the ACSI project charter and are full participants in the ACSI project:

- Aliant
- Antigonish Sustainable Development Committee
- Bathurst Sustainable Development
- Halifax Regional Municipality
- Halifax Shambhala Centre
- iNova Credit Union
- Jacques Whitford Ltd.
- Just Us! Coffee Roasters
- P'lovers, the Environmental Store
- City of Saint John
- Stewardship and Outreach Section, Nova Scotia Department of Natural Resources
- Town of Stratford
- Town of Wolfville

The following organizations and communities are engaged as strategic partners or supporters and are participants in the ACSI network:

- Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
- AuCoeur\Occur Sustainable Communities
- Canadian CED Network
- C-CIARN Atlantic
- Centre for Rural Sustainability
- Coastal Communities Network
- Ecology Action Centre
- Environment & Sustainable Development Research Centre, University of New Brunswick
- Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)
- Genuine Progress Index Atlantic
- International Centre for Sustainable Cities (ICSC)
- Memorial University
- New Brunswick Environmental Network
- Nova Scotia Environmental Network
- Province of New Brunswick (Department of Environment)
- Province of Nova Scotia (Departments of Environment and Labour, Natural Resources, Municipal Relations, and the Office of Economic Development)



- Public Works and Government Services Canada
- Rural Secretariat and the Nova Scotia Rural Team
- Saint Margaret's Bay Stewardship Association
- Shambhala Institute
- Sierra Club of Canada – Atlantic Canada Chapter
- Sustainable Energy in New Glasgow Project
- The Co-operators Insurance Company
- Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities
- Windhorse Education Foundation
- White Point Beach Resort

We have project partners in New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, and partners representing the Atlantic region as a whole. Recruitment of additional partners in Newfoundland is ongoing.

Appendix 3 – Description of Initiative and outcomes

Atlantic Canada Sustainability Initiative – Project Charter

Purpose

This Charter outlines the commitment of our organization to the Atlantic Canada Sustainability Initiative. This Initiative is intended to build capacity and commitment among a diverse group of Atlantic organizations who will advance sustainable development within our own organizations and the Atlantic Region as a whole using the Natural Step Framework as a guide.

Objectives

We view this initiative as a first step in an ongoing commitment and journey towards a more sustainable future. We commit to actively participate in this project in an effort to:

- **build capacity and competence** within our organization to become better leaders in sustainable development;
- **create and implement a plan of action** that advances sustainability within our organization through concrete actions;
- **serve as role models** by sharing our own organization's successes and lessons with respect to sustainability;
- **build an effective network** that collaborates and supports progress towards sustainability;
- **build regional momentum** towards sustainability by engaging citizens, organizations and governments within the Atlantic Region; and
- **identify and act on opportunities** collaboratively to help move the region towards sustainability

Scope



- The scope of work associated with this initiative is as outlined in the Project Plan attached as Schedule 1.

Our Commitment

As a Sustainability Partner in the Atlantic Canada Sustainability Initiative, we commit to:

- Collaborate on the design and delivery of this initiative.
- Commit time and finances for 3 – 5 individuals from our organization to attend training sessions and meetings as part of the program.
- Ensure that the senior leaders from our organization attend strategic functions of the program including the launch dinner.
- Advance sustainability within our organization by committing to do one or more of the following (informed by the Natural Step Framework):
 - Develop a Sustainability Action Plan
 - Develop an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan
 - Integrate sustainability into the community's Municipal Development Plan
 - Develop a program to incorporate sustainability into the culture of our organization
- Participate in an initial training workshop and two subsequent workshops, at six months and one year following the initial workshop, to share success stories and lessons learned, engage in additional learning from each other and/or from identified resources, and to collaboratively identify and act on opportunities to help move the Atlantic region towards sustainability.
- Participate in peer to peer networking with other sustainability partners.
- Play a leadership role in the community and in the region with respect to sustainability.
- Covering the workshop fees for our own participation (\$250 per person per workshop), and the associated travel and accommodations.
- Also helping to ensure sufficient resources are in place to cover the costs of the entire project and assist with raising/investing funds to support the regional initiative (as outlined in the budget in Schedule 2).
- Assist with evaluating the success and effectiveness of this initiative.

The Natural Step (TNS) Canada agrees to:

- Provide high level direction and support, and assist with project management.
- Collaborate on the design and delivery of this initiative to ensure that project objectives are met.
- Design and deliver the training workshops.
- Recruit additional speakers and expertise as appropriate.
- Provide 2 days of coaching for each of the sustainability partners.
- Commit grant money to this initiative to support TNS Canada's participation.

The Project Coordinator will:

- Collaborate on the design and delivery of this initiative.
- Facilitate peer to peer networking amongst project partners.
- Co-develop and implement a funding plan for the initiative.
- Provide fundraising support and financial oversight of the project.



- Secure venues and provide logistical support for the initiative.
- Provide internal and external communications.
- Facilitate the development of a communications plan for the regional initiative.
- Assemble and maintain a resource centre (books, papers, case studies, PowerPoint presentations, etc.) to support sustainability partners.



Appendix 4 – Project Timeline

Launch Dinner

May 14, 2007

- Intended for leaders from partner organizations, potential partner organizations, businesses, provincial and federal government (i.e. Mayors, CAOs, CEOs or Presidents, Ministers etc.), as well as workshop participants.
- Purpose: build high level awareness, support and enthusiasm for the initiative.

Two-Day Capacity-Building Workshop (Workshop #1)

May 15-16, 2007

- Intended for 3 – 5 people from each partner organization.
- Purpose: provide participants with an awareness, understanding and a common language of sustainability and the capacity to begin moving their organization, and eventually the whole Atlantic Region, towards sustainability.

Homework Assignment

May-June 2007

- Partners identify and agree on an initiative and process for advancing sustainability within their organizations. The initiative and process should be one of the following: a) developing a sustainability action plan; b) developing an Integrated Community Sustainability Plan; c) integrating sustainability into the community's Municipal Development Plan; or d) incorporating sustainability into the culture of the organization.
- Submit to TNS for review.

Coaching: Begin Sustainability Initiative

June-November 2007

- TNS Canada will provide 1 day of coaching for each organization to review the proposed sustainability initiative and to help get started on it.
- Undertake sustainability initiative. →
- Opportunities for peer to peer networking to share experiences.

Additional coaching or training from TNS Canada will be available for project partners. Additional funding however would be required for this to occur.

Workshop #2

November 13-14, 2007

- Purpose:
 - Share success stories, learn from each other, receive additional TNS training and continue building the network.
 - If participants identify specific needs or interests, and budget allows, additional training or coaching may take place (i.e. bring in experts in the fields of energy, transportation, green building, community engagement, communicating sustainability, monitoring, governance, etc.).



- This workshop will also be used to begin developing a high level sustainability analysis of the Atlantic Region. Following this session, the coordinator will gather additional information to feed into the sustainability analysis.

Coaching: Continue Sustainability Initiative

November 2007 – April 2008

- TNS Canada will provide 1 day of coaching for each organization to help with the development of the sustainability initiative or with implementation.

Two-Day Regional Summit

April 17-18, 2008

- Purpose day 1:
 - Intended for sustainability partners, community, government and business leaders and other organizations who are interested in joining the network and committing to action.
 - Project partners share successes with each other and with the larger Atlantic and national community. A special media event will be hosted to generate regional and national interest in the initiative.
- Purpose day 2:
 - Working session of sustainability partners and with participation from invited observers.
 - Review the sustainability analysis and brainstorm and prioritize actions that will help move the Atlantic Region towards sustainability. Actions will be assigned to partner organizations.

Next Steps

Post April 2008

- We recognize that the first year of this project is a step on the road to a more sustainable future. On the basis of our experience, we anticipate that the project partners will identify further actions and initiatives that will continue to move the initiative forward once the first year is finished. Sustainability partners agree to:
 - Support regional initiatives.
 - Play a sustainability leadership role in their communities.
 - Participate in ongoing networking, information sharing, and peer learning among sustainability partners.
 - Engage and support other communities, other businesses, and other levels of government to create a broad-based network which -- united by common vision of a sustainable Atlantic Canada and a common commitment to action -- generates a sustainability tipping point for the region.
 - Participate in project evaluation and follow-up.
 - Take appropriate action on next steps as identified at the workshop.
 - Help organize another round of the project with new partners.