



Sustainable Procurement Webinar

March 13, 2008

What is sustainable purchasing? According to the Municipality of Whistler's Sustainable Purchasing Guide, it is about including social, environmental, financial and performance factors in purchasing decisions in a systematic way.

On Thursday, March 13, ACSI hosted an online learning session (a webinar) on sustainable procurement. The workshop opened with a presentation by Ted Battiston, the Manager of Sustainability Initiatives for the Resort Municipality of Whistler. Using The Natural Step framework, Whistler has developed a cutting-edge sustainability vision and a plan for getting there (see <http://www.whistler2020.ca/> for more information). As part of this process, they put in place a Sustainable Purchasing Guide in 2006 (see link to the guide below).

Ted has an Honours degree in Applied Kinesiology as well as a Master's degree in Environmental Studies. His primary interests lie in the fields of environmental management - particularly as they relate to tourism and recreation. He was project lead for the Whistler2020 Comprehensive Sustainability Plan over the last three years prior to taking on his current role as Manager of Sustainability Initiatives. Ted is now responsible for co-creating in-house sustainability solutions throughout the municipal organization. Specific areas of responsibility include GHG management initiatives, bylaw development, as well as frameworks for integrating sustainability commitments into daily decision making within the municipal organization.

The webinar opened with a presentation by Ted about Whistler's experience with sustainability planning, and in particular with sustainable purchasing. A few highlights from the presentation include:

- Research by James Hogan shows that most people care about sustainability but are missing the technical details of how to make this work. So start from the basic premise that most people want to see changes towards greater sustainability.
- A brief history of the Whistler initiative: A visit from the founder of The Natural Step founder, Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt, who made a presentation to the Chamber of Commerce, came just at the right time and opened up their eyes and ears to sustainability and incorporating this into long term planning. 5 early adopter organizations used TNS principles to develop a sustainability plan and vision together with the community.
- Whistler has identified 17 different areas (food recently added) - each has a task force of specialists working in each of these areas working on development of action plans.
- The Natural Step framework has been used as the integrating framework and applied equally to all areas (e.g. works equally well for water and for arts and culture). Their description of success depends on the 4 TNS system conditions.
- The Municipality gives back about 1% of tax revenue to charities/non-profits in the community, with the criteria that funded projects are moving towards the agreed community vision of success. This kind of approach increases literacy about sustainability and about Whistler's vision.
- Sustainability is a key criteria in all decision-making, but not the only one. It is integrated everywhere.



- Example: all those who are purchasing need to have an answer for questions about sustainability (e.g. why did you purchase 30% recycled paper rather than 100% - have to be able to explain this in the sustainability context). This is why their Purchasing Guide was developed.
- A sustainability lens is also integrated into decisions about capital projects. Every RFP and report to council also includes a reference back to the sustainability plan.
- They have a very transparent process: all areas of the plan have indicators, and the indicators are trackable online and searchable by system condition. This also helps to raise the level of dialogue across the community about sustainability.

Strengths of the Whistler approach to sustainable purchasing:

- Highly consistent with higher level policies and definitions of sustainability and definitions of sustainability - integrated approach throughout the organization.
- Integrated across contexts and departments. This leads to layered repetition of principles and continuous support for the approach.
- It also leads to non-purchasing innovation in the purchasing department and purchasing innovation in non-purchasing purchasing departments.
- Consistency with the work of TNS Canada, and others who use the same approach - they received a lot of external support and help as they were developing the purchasing policy and guide. They were also able to share information because it is all based on the same framework, so it is easier to apply things done elsewhere to the Whistler context.

Shortcomings of the Whistler approach to sustainable purchasing:

- Time consuming to create the shared language (TNS) and resource intensive to create the associated training and tools.
- We were late to the party around CBSM (community based social marketing): Information alone is not communication; Need to tell the stories in-house, build pride and ownership; Collect the metrics to validate your stories.
- Decentralized purchasing responsibilities is both a strength and a weakness - understand each and deal with them appropriately.

Please see the full presentation (available on the ACSI website under Resources), or the Whistle 2020 website (<http://www.whistler2020.ca/>) for more detailed information.

Questions and Discussion

Q1: Tell us more about the broader process of culture change in Whistler within which the sustainable purchasing policy was developed.

- Sustainability planning was always seen as a process for the Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW) and the whole community to do in partnership.
- The municipal departments were changed - they were held accountable to the sustainability vision that was developed, and built that accountability into their work requirements.
- The onus is now more on the departments - each one is encouraged to figure out their own initiatives they want to do to move towards the goals - this approach has been really successful.



Q2: How many participants in Whistler are using The Natural Step? In ACSI?

- Whistler has about 37 partners in their sustainability project but only a portion of them are actively working with TNS rather than working more broadly towards sustainability goals.
- ACSI has 13 formal sustainability partners working with The Natural Step framework.

Q3: Is renewable energy a key objective given the first Natural Step principle? If so, what is the strategy here?

- Whistler is working on an energy strategy. It's not specific to renewables but they do think about this.
- Look at energy section of the Whistler 2020 website to see how they have embedded renewable energy into their strategies.
- There are 2 key strategies to move away from burning fossil fuels: become more efficient in the use of fossil fuels, and shift away from them as an energy source. Any good plan needs to include both of these approaches.

Q4: Within this community-wide plan, any organization can come forward to propose new ways to reach targets - is there funding for this, and how does the municipality find the funding for them?

- They have a community funding program that is accessible to any NGO. All applicants have to show how their project moves the community towards its sustainability goals.
- It's also good to use low hanging fruit (easy to achieve changes) to pay for later initiatives.

Q5: Are municipal employees unionized and was getting union buy in important?

- The employees are generally not unionized, so can't comment much on this.
- However, it is important to create buy in with all stakeholders. For example, use different language depending on the audience, a common language that will connect with those you are talking to.

Q6: Where alternative products are preferred, but supply infrastructure is lacking (e.g. would like to use more renewable energy, but not provided in the community), what does the municipality do?

- Getting access to quality products is a challenge that everyone faces. You can't always get the best solution right away or at all.
- They always make sure that they're using a flexible platform. This ensures that if a better solution comes along, it is easier to make a shift.
- They also look also for suppliers that will work with them in providing more sustainable products - push up on the supply chain both explicitly and implicitly.

Resource documents (all available on the ACSI website in the resources section)

Purchasing Guide, Prepared by the Municipality of Whistler

Purchasing Policy, Prepared by the Municipality of Whistler

The Natural Step Primer for Atlantic Canada, Prepared by GPI Atlantic



Links

Whistler's Sustainability Vision (including the plan and indicators):

<http://www.whistler2020.ca/>

Atlantic Canada Sustainability Initiative: <http://www.atlanticsustainability.ca>

Lecture on TNS by the founder of The Natural Step, Dr. Karl-Henrik Robèrt (149 MB video): <http://www.atlanticsustainability.ca/downloads/TNS/Roberth264.mov>