

# State Models for Sustainable Development

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Communities throughout the United States and around the world are taking a new approach toward solving their economic, environmental, social, and financial problems. Instead of assigning problems to isolated parts of government, the issues are increasingly being explored in an integrated manner, bringing together all concerned departments. Instead of maximizing current consumption with extractive, polluting industries and impersonal, inefficient governments, communities are striving to transform themselves to prosper in the long-run. It begins with the bringing together of all interests--business, government, environmental, labor, and public--to find new ways to operate which meet the needs of both the present and future generations.

In 1972, the United Nations held the Stockholm Conference on Human Environment, which recognized the need for sustainable development. Subsequently, the United Nations formed the Environment Protection Commission, resulting in discussions concerning environmental protection and resource management on both the international and national levels. But it has only been in the past five years that the United States has witnessed solid advances towards fulfilling sustainable development goals. In particular, following the release of *Agenda 21* from the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development held in Rio de Janeiro in June 1992, President

Clinton established the President's Council on Sustainable Development (PCSD) in 1993. Consequently, sustainable development has become an increasingly visible policy priority for nearly all levels of government in the United States.

Aside from the formation of the PCSD, little has happened in the area of sustainable development at the federal level; rather, the states have begun to pave the way for innovative sustainable development initiatives and policies. However, in order for states to create a successful sustainable development plan which will evolve into solid policy, there are some fundamental steps which must be followed. Unfortunately, all too often one or more of these steps is neglected, resulting in an ineffective, noncomprehensive strategy. But what is required of a successful sustainable development plan? While there are no hard and fast rules, and while there is no one perfect plan, some elements remain essential. This article seeks to address all those challenges which present themselves to states developing sustainability strategies. Four states, Minnesota, Kentucky, Maine, and Virginia, have enthusiastically taken on the challenges; consequently, they have made significant advances in creating a sustainable future for their state. Nevertheless, although leaders in sustainable development, these states, as well as others, need to accomplish much more in order to achieve sustainability.

## A State-Level Model for Sustainable Development

First, people must recognize that if conventional indicators of economic growth, such as consumption and spending, continue to be used and desired, the quality of life of all beings will be compromised in the long-run. People must realize that the need for inte-

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grating economic development, environmental protection, and social needs is an immediate and urgent one. Education and understanding remain a crucial step in meeting this need and many states have willingly taken up the task, as evidenced by the increasing number of states hosting conferences in hopes of raising awareness and building consensus on the issue. However, some of these conferences are composed solely of government leaders and experts in the private sector. Without the full understanding and support of all the interested parties, including the general public, the challenge of achieving sustainable development becomes more difficult.

The next step involves researching the environmental, economic, and social conditions of each state to determine its needs. Is the consumption of natural resources exceeding replenishment? What are the levels of air, soil, and water quality? Is a particular community overly dependent on a single industry? Rural states which use extensive irrigation systems and a large quantity of chemical fertilizers have different needs than heavily populated states which experience chronic transportation problems. Thus, in order for a state to develop a comprehensive strategy, it must understand its present and be able to anticipate its future.

Concurrent with this research, a state should begin formulating its vision towards sustainability. This vision will generate and prioritize specific goals and develop timetables in which to achieve them. All issues, environmental, economic, and social, as well as educational, must be integrated. In addition to serving as an educational tool, state conferences have proven to be fairly effective in formulating a vision and recommendations which reflect the needs and wants of all parties. Round table formats have also had success in bringing all interested parties into the discussion.

An on-going outreach mechanism, providing both background about sustainable development and updates of state activity, should be in place and easily accessible to the public. Education and full participation of all people provide the needed support, research provides the data, and a vision provides definite goals, but all this is futile without implementation. Positive changes in the way government and industry do business, demonstration projects to prove that sustainability can work, and issue-specific legislation nestled within a larger vision of sustainable development are the keys to creating a sustainable future. However, if and when implementation occurs, the task of ensuring sustainable development is not yet complete. Indices and benchmarks must also be developed in order to adequately monitor sustainable development activity.

### *Minnesota*

In January, 1993, Governor Arne Carlson, the Environmental Quality Board, and the Commissioner of Trade and Economic Development introduced the *Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative*, an ambitious, year-long effort to develop recommendations to create a sustainable future for Minnesota. Unlike other initiatives which have been vague or included only select participants, Minnesota's plan distinguished itself by specifically creating fact-finding missions and strategy-development tasks for seven Initiative Teams to work on. The ultimate goal of each team was to provide recommendations which in turn would be applied or made into new legislation.

Representatives from business, academia, government, environmental, and citizen groups comprised each of the seven teams. Led by two co-chairs, one each from the environmental and economic sectors, the teams dealt with issues important to the state: agriculture, energy, forestry, manufacturing, minerals, recreation, and settlement. Teams met monthly to discuss issues and problems, recognize innovations, and develop strategies which could be implemented toward sustainable development. Three plenary sessions were conducted to discuss overlapping issues and to develop an integrated set of recommendations. According to the guidelines established for all teams, meetings were open to the public and the draft recommendations, presented in December 1993, were made available for public comment at the February 1994 Minnesota Congress on Sustainable Development.

The recommendations addressed such topics as full-cost accounting, integrated land use, financial incentives and disincentives, and education and information collection. All recommendations have been proposed to the Minnesota legislature in hopes of bringing about some change in the way Minnesota looks at its economic development and environmental protection.

*The Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative* certainly made significant strides towards fulfilling the goal of sustainable development; unfortunately, its efforts ended with the final meeting, held in November 1993. Essentially, the study was a "one-shot deal," says John Green, a member of the Minerals Initiatives team, who described the overall experience as beneficial in that it heightened awareness among participants and set forth many positive recommendations which have a good chance of being implemented. However, like many recommendations offered for legislation, Green noted that some are too complicated and too "sticky" even to be touched.

Ideally, the initiative should have included a lobbying mechanism to ensure that the legislature would recog-



nize and consider the proposed recommendations. Or, at a minimum, some sort of lobbying effort should have been included within the list of recommendations. Whether the objectives of the initiative were achieved or not will be revealed in future legislation. However, so far things have already started on the wrong foot. In late May 1994, the Governor vetoed parts of a bill which would have set aside funding to further the efforts of the initiative. This is an all too frequent example of progressive ideas falling short of their potential.

### Kentucky

Following up on the Earth Summit held in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, Governor Brereton Jones and Dr. Lilialyce Akers initiated a conference similar to Minnesota's to discuss sustainability issues for the state of Kentucky; however, interest was so great that the conference soon expanded to a national level. Thus, in May 1993, Kentucky hosted *From Rio to the Capitols: State Strategies for Sustainable Development*. Government officials, citizens, and members of non-governmental organizations and business convened to learn about sustainable development. The conference certainly succeeded in overcoming the first obstacle by pushing dialogue on sustainable devel-

opment out onto the table. Participants addressed important topics such as how government policies can better reconcile economics and the environment and how communities can encourage business to adopt clean technologies.

The conference included regional forums, composed of participants hailing from regions with similar economic, geographical, and social conditions, which served to compare and discuss strategies, experiences, and impressions on sustainable development on a more micro-level. The regional forums also addressed the specific needs of the various regions and recommended actions to respond to them. The conference was so well received that a similar one will be held in Arizona next year.

The conference prompted the Kentucky Cabinet of Economic Development and Cabinet of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection to co-sponsor the Sustainability Round Table Information Forum. Over fifty leaders from various sectors came together to discuss ways to integrate economic development, environmental protection, and social needs for Kentucky. The participants also examined existing Round Table processes in order to select one as a model for Kentucky. As a result, the Sustainable Kentucky Round Table was created, based on British Columbia's Round Table and the *Minnesota Sustainable Development Initiative* discussed above. Patricia Scruggs, the facilitator of the Information Forum, described one of the objectives of the Sustainable Kentucky Round Table as taking the dialogue which was started at the *Rio to the Capitols* conference "from just talk into a little more discrete action." The hope is also to build consensus among all the sectors.

In addition, in 1992 the General Assembly created the Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center. The Center's mission is to serve as a catalyst to improve the way decisions are made by looking at them in a broader context, specifically long-term implications, critical trends, and emerging issues. The Center will also focus on developing a long-term strategic policy for the state.

Although the Center is fairly small and still in the early stages, it has perhaps the greatest potential for successfully developing sustainable development initiatives in the country. Slated for the Center's agenda is Kentucky Outlook 2000, an initiative funded by the Environmental Protection Agency. The task challenges the Center, working with the Cabinet for Natural Resources and Environmental Protection, to anticipate future needs of the state and respond to them by coming up with solutions without jeopardizing quality of life. By educating people through hosting a national



A speaker addresses a small business panel at Kentucky's *Rio to the Capitols* conference. Credit: Charles Pierce

conference, by initiating Round Table discussions to build consensus and to come up with sustainable development strategies, and by establishing a Long-Term Policy Research Center, Kentucky has certainly taken the first steps toward sustainable development.

### *Maine*

Maine has made considerable gains in creating a sustainable future for the state. In 1993, the 116th Maine Legislature passed House Bill 616, addressing "the purpose and philosophy of sustainable development and its relevance to regions of the State and the State as a whole" and mandating that the Economic Development and Business Assistance Coordinating Council develop economic development guidelines adhering to the principles of sustainable development. In addition to offering recommendations, the Coordinating Council helps local regions develop long-term economic strategies and assists in implementation by coordinating state services. To date, all work conducted by the Coordinating Council has been voluntary: funding for the Council was not included in the legislation. Naturally, this has created many obstacles. The Council suffers from understaffing and resource shortages. In addition, there is some confusion over the draft report. The intentions of the members are solid and positive, but the recommendations have become tangled in the verbiage of the report. What the recommendations actually suggest is still under dispute.

Subsequent legislation called for the creation of the Maine Economic Growth Council to assist the Coordinating Council in developing standards and principles for sustainable development. Originally, it was an eight-week effort to hammer out recommendations to be presented to the governor and state legislature. Topics addressed were Energy and Utilities, Regulatory Policy, Job Training and Education, and Tax and Fiscal Policy. Overall, more than two hundred people from the state legislature and industries came together to work on recommendations which were finally presented in May 1993. Larry Horwitz, a Council member, commented that a fundamental problem with the Council was the lack of an environmental perspective and that the Council began with "preconceived notions of what the outcome should be," suggesting only quick fixes rather than looking at the underlying problem. Recommended actions included establishing a new environmental regulatory permitting process, implementing favorable pricing mechanisms to encourage the efficient use of existing energy supplies, setting up an implementation mechanism, and continuing further with the initial effort of the Growth Council. The latter recommendation spawned further legislation providing

funding for an on-going Economic Growth Council.

This second Economic Growth Council has started working on the preliminary stages of developing a vision to jump-start Maine's economy. The nineteen member Growth Council is made up of state legislators and representatives from the labor, education, business, and environment sectors from across the state. According to Henry Bourgeois at the Maine Development Foundation, which works with the Council, support and consensus among Growth Council members have been positive.

However, neither the Coordinating Council nor the Growth Council has attempted to define what specifically makes up sustainable economic growth. The two Councils must engage in a "significant discussion on what economic growth is" in order to move onto the next step, comments John Bubier, who serves as an advisor on the Economic Growth Council and a full member on the Coordinating Council. But because the recommendations offered by the Economic Growth Council are currently set within a fairly broad context, they are more likely to be implemented. Mr. Bubier also noted that achieving collaboration between all groups has been difficult.

The idea behind the legislation establishing the two Councils is a commendable one since it forces the state to look at all factors concerning economic growth. But the steps have been small and slow. Representatives from the environmental and social organizations, essential parties when forming a sustainable development plan, are underrepresented. And as noted earlier, funding for the Coordinating Council is nonexistent, further complicating the process. Moreover, the two Councils essentially work independently of one another. More stands to be gained if both Councils work together.

Although opinions on the Councils remain varied and conflicting, Maine continues to work on creating a sustainable future. A particularly successful example of sustainable development policy in action is Maine's Sensible Transportation Policy, which voters passed as a referendum in response to a proposal to widen the Maine Turnpike. The people of Maine have realized that the state's transportation network has the potential to impose lasting and sometimes harmful effects on the quality of air, land, and water. Thus, it is the policy's goal to minimize these negative effects by evaluating all reasonable alternatives for highway construction or reconstruction projects, reducing the state's dependence on foreign oil, encouraging energy-efficient forms of transportation, ensuring necessary repairs and improvements on all roads, meeting the transportation needs of all Maine residents, and incorporating



a public participation process to address the concerns of the people. In order to meet the public participation directive, eight Regional Transportation Advisory Committees were established. Members were selected from a pool of applicants and are currently meeting throughout the state to develop regional transportation plans and funding priorities.

As a result of this policy, the Maine Turnpike was not expanded. Rather, the Maine Turnpike Authority is investing in alternative, multi-modal transportation programs, including car pools and trains. In addition, a highly ambitious and truly multi-modal transportation system, which includes the use of taxi cabs, limousines, buses, and trolleys, is in the works in the town of Wells. Another example of the policy's success is the Transportation Improvement Program in Portland. The city allocated over half of an almost \$9 million transportation budget to non-highway projects. Instead, bicycle routes, sidewalks, and improvements to the subway systems are being worked on. Policies such as the Sensible Transportation Policy should not only be praised, but emulated by other states around the country; the plan contained all the necessary components to be successful, and clearly it is.

### Virginia

Much along the same lines as Maine, the Virginia House passed Joint Resolution No. 653 in February 1993 which called for the development of a state sustainable development strategy. In response to this, the Environmental Law Institute, an independent research and education center, has released *Blueprint for Sustainable Development of Virginia*. This report discusses such issues as pollution prevention, air quality, community building, and economic vitality and provides recommendations and solutions to work toward these goals.

In March 1994, the House passed Joint Resolution No. 291, calling for the creation of a Sustainable Development Task Force to "assess current sustainable development initiatives in the Commonwealth and other areas, develop a statewide strategic plan for sustainable development, and recommend appropriate actions which state and local governments, citizen groups, and nonprofit organizations, especially rural areas of the Commonwealth, might consider for implementation." Unlike the 1993 resolution which encourages Virginians to consider sustainable development alternatives for the state, Resolution No. 291 brings together multiple stakeholders to specifically look at and recommend actions. Staff support, technical assistance, and some funding have been allocated to assist in its efforts.

Unfortunately, organization of the Task Force has been slow. In addition to the Secretaries of Commerce and Trade, who make up part of the Task Force, all the legislative members have been appointed; however, the Governor has yet to appoint any of the six citizen members. Moreover, assignments to study the fifty or sixty issues have also not been made. According to the resolution, all findings and recommendations should be completed in time to be presented to the 1995 General Assembly, allowing less than a year for the Task Force to select members, educate and build consensus among them, conduct meetings and research, create a vision, and formulate recommendations. Although it is encouraging to see Virginia so anxious to begin sustainability efforts, more time is needed in order to produce a comprehensive and complete study and consequently, to propose appropriate recommendations.

### Looking Forward

Almost inevitably, with sustainable development discussion comes opposing views, frustration, and disagreements. It is unlikely that all parties will be completely satisfied with the results. Fortunately, this has not scared away Minnesota, Kentucky, Maine, and Virginia from seriously addressing the issue. In doing so, they have become models for sustainable development.

Both Minnesota and Kentucky have experienced some success in transforming their communities into sustainable ones. Kentucky has been quite progressive in that it is taking the issue of sustainability head-on. Likewise, the one-year initiative in Minnesota helped to move sustainable development a step in the right direction, but with the recent veto of additional funding towards sustainability efforts, it appears that the state has only more difficulties to come. And although the recommendations from both states hold great promise, nothing will be accomplished without full support from all communities.

Virginia and Maine lead the pack in terms of progressive resolutions and legislation by creating a forum where sustainable development is specifically discussed and sought after. Currently, each state is encountering difficulty, but hopefully, in time, Virginia's Task Force and Maine's Councils will emerge with innovative recommendations and ideas on how to implement them.

Indeed, the need for sustainable development has been recognized, and many states have jumped to the challenge. Conferences and round tables are cropping up all over the country from Alaska to Florida and places in between. Unfortunately, some initiatives

have been cut short due to little or no funding. Some contain ambitious recommendations but lack the consensus and support needed from all groups. Others are subject to the often wavering political attitudes of the day. And many conduct extensive research and make substantial recommendations but lack a means of implementation. Until all these aspects are resolved, the notion of a sustainable future will remain just that, in the future. CP