

Advocacy Policy

As adopted by board resolution December 7, 2020

Part 1. Collaborating with the Public Sector

West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum is a supporter of public-private partnerships that provide shared capacity or resources for sustainability initiatives, or that increase community sustainability. From time to time the forum may take an active role in the creation of such partnerships, either as facilitator or supporter. Guiding principles are outlined in the forum bylaws.

Part 2. Advocacy for Improved Public Policy

West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum will take a formal position on laws and proposed laws that advance its strategic objectives or the business interests of the organization. The forum will carefully weigh the diverse interests of its members and stakeholder communities when doing so. Strategic objectives are defined generally in the organization's strategic plan, with specific issue positions to be formally approved in writing by the board of directors. To the degree practical and appropriate, it may encourage its members to support/take action on laws or proposals, as well as budget allocations and spending decisions.

On issues that the forum does not take a position, it may provide access for member advocacy groups to meet interested businesses. It may also provide opportunities for education on such issues. WMSBF believes that members have ample opportunity to participate in political advocacy or activism through other groups that exist primarily for that purpose. On issues that the forum has taken a position, it will recognize no obligation to provide an alternative perspective to its members.

Part 3. Non-Solicitation

The forum will only conduct fundraising/charitable solicitation on behalf of its programs. It will not provide any support to the fundraising efforts of other non-profit groups. However, interested non-profits are welcome to take full advantage of WMSBF membership, sponsorships and networking events.

Advocacy Process

Advocacy within Strategic Plan

Staff will evaluate advocacy requests from partners and project opportunities for alignment with mission, strategic plan, and stated positions. The executive director will make the decision on how to move forward with recommendations from staff. If alignment is clear, move forward with advocacy appropriate to available capacity and interest. Projects will generally go before the board before execution.

Determining Alignment and Merit

Staff will evaluate requests and opportunities based on the following criteria:

1. Does this align with an existing policy position?
2. If so, will our participation be impactful, if not necessary?
3. If so, have we done the work to engage stakeholders within our membership and community to understand the potential impacts of the solution we would be supporting?

If alignment is unclear, the Executive Director will engage the board president to evaluate any conflicts. If they're in support, move to action. If further clarification is needed, engage the executive board. When an advocacy request to both the executive director and board president aren't clearly aligned with business interests or the mission and strategy of the organization, the matter will be brought to the full board for direction.

As a rule of thumb, the forum will generally decline to respond to advocacy requests (eg: sign-on letters) on issues that it has not had previously engaged in through an event, working group discussion, or project.

Defining Positions

The Forum will be selective and intentional in its policy positions and advocacy. Positions will be developed with input from members and other stakeholders, vetted through a Racial Equity Impact Assessment, and work toward an achievable outcome. Ideally advocacy efforts and positions are integrated into work products.

When receiving requests to join a coalition or initiative, staff is free to participate for the purposes of exploration and evaluation if the issue aligns with the strategic plan but not an existing position.

Choosing Not to Act

Staff and board should feel comfortable turning down requests from partners or members. It is not our responsibility to be informed and active on every issue, nor is it disrespectful or compromising to decline to participate in concerns that are not priorities for our organization, or to have material differences of opinion on positions or approaches. Our role is to engage businesses and institutions, and it is neither practical or sincere to take positions that are not part of that work.

As a notable example, the Michigan Environmental Justice Coalition has a policy platform that opposes the use of carbon financing, a practice we encourage in many applications. Declining to endorse that position does not mean that we are adversaries or bad partners to MEJC, or invalidate our credentials as champions of environmental justice. Staff or board members that are not prepared to articulate these distinctions should avoid representing the Forum on policy matters.