

West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum Strategic Plan 2017 - 2020

Approved by the Board of Directors May 1, 2017



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Table of Contents



Mission and Organization	4
History	5
Organizational Chart	6
The Strategic Plan	7

About WMSBF



West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum is a regional collaboration of business, government, non-profits and academia dedicated to promoting business practices that demonstrate environmental stewardship, economic vitality, and social responsibility. It is the leading organization for practitioners of beyond-compliance sustainability practices in the Midwest, promoting positive community change and operational improvements through education, collaboration and resource development.

Our membership includes West Michigan's most recognizable brands, largest employers and most innovative entrepreneurs, advocates and educators.

History



With the rise of the modern environmental movement in the second half of the last century, the nation began to take notice of the negative impacts of certain business practices on the natural environment and human health. Adjustments in practices, systems, and equipment to comply with new regulations, required large financial investments. Aiming beyond compliance toward more sustainable business practices limited the risk of future regulations, and also provided economic value back to the organization.

In West Michigan, a select group was taking it further, experiencing personal revelations about the role of business in environmental and social concerns. Emboldened by a culture that prioritizes natural resources and well-being of employees and community, a small group of businesses formed the charter membership of West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum.

There was no guidance for sustainable industry, and no best practices, so they created their own. They put competitive differences aside to pursue common goals. Informal knowledge sharing produced countless environmental and social benefits for the region, laying the foundation for local industries' adoption of sustainability.

Today the region's sustainability claims and green bona fides are well known. WMSBF helped make it acceptable, even mainstream, for local businesses and institutions to pursue such efforts. Through it all there was a common thread: a focus on practices that reduced environmental impacts and benefited communities and society, while also being financially feasible, preferably increasing the profitability of an organization. WMSBF helps organizations balance their impacts on people, planet and profit, the Triple Bottom Line.

WMSBF launched in 1994 as a program of West Michigan Environmental Action Council. It became an independent 501(c) 3 nonprofit in 2009.

Organization



West Michigan Sustainable Business Forum is governed by a **Board of Directors** chosen from its membership. Directors serve two-year terms. By charter, the board includes at least one representative each from education, government and the non-profit community. By policy, it also includes two representatives from its Southwest Michigan membership.

The **Executive Committee** is empowered with all of the authority of the Board of Directors to act on matters necessary to the timely and efficient management of the organization. It includes the six officers: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer, Immediate Past President and Executive Director.

The **Executive Director** reports to the Board and is responsible for execution of its objectives. The Executive Director manages a team of employees, interns, vendors, consultants and volunteers committed to the WMSBF mission.

Leadership Committees are chartered by the Board to oversee the organization's strategic interests, including its regional satellites and four strategic focus areas: Climate Change, Circular Economy and Solid Waste, Social Responsibility and Strategic Growth. Principally concerned with strategic objectives, the committees may charter working groups for implementation of organizational objectives

Strategic Plan



This strategic plan is the result of a year-long planning effort that began in 2016 and ended in 2017, the first major planning process for the organization since it became an independent non-profit. The plan will guide our efforts for the three-year period from June 2017 to May 2020.

Our 2020 Strategic Plan will focus on these core objectives:

- Grow participation, programs and membership. Improve financial security of the organization.
- Lead commercial and industrial waste diversion and circular economy efforts in West Michigan.
- Help the West Michigan business community understand and respond to climate change.
- Emphasize the need for corporate investment in social responsibility and social equity.

Strategic Growth



Grow participation, programs and membership. Improve financial security of the organization.

We will focus on intentional and targeted efforts to grow members, membership value, participation in forum programs, and adoption of sustainable business practices. Growth efforts complement and align with the other three strategic focus areas, while also maintaining strength of core programs and member services.

Objective 1: Advance continuous capacity improvements including the diversification of revenue streams, the modernization of financial and governance structures, policies and plans, and investment in a larger regional market.

Objective 2: Improve WMSBF brand and program awareness.

Objective 3: Create targeted audience campaigns for constituencies with unmet sustainable business needs, including resources and programming.

Strategic Growth



Grow participation, programs and membership. Improve financial security of the organization.

Objective 4: Provide opportunities for professional growth, networking and recognition through leadership committees and working groups aligned with the four strategic focuses.

Objective 5: Facilitate development of technical sustainability resources and support for organizations, teams and practitioners, from emerging to experienced.

Objective 6: Offer the Midwest's premier regional sustainable business education and networking program.

Circular Economy and Zero Waste -1



Lead commercial and industrial waste diversion and circular economy efforts in West Michigan.

Journey to Zero Waste: Zero Waste to Landfill initiatives are proven to maximize recycling, minimize waste, reduce consumption and ensure that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace. We will support and celebrate the efforts of local businesses to improve waste diversion and minimization, encouraging a continuous improvement philosophy that will over time increase the number of local organizations with zero waste to landfill goals.

Objective 1: Address “low-hanging fruit” waste diversion opportunities in commercial and industrial operations (eg: office paper and cardboard) through education, resource development and training.

Objective 2: Introduce local organizations to zero waste to landfill efforts and increase the number of local organizations with formal ZWTL goals through a community challenge, recognition program, education and resource development.

Circular Economy and Zero Waste - 2



Lead commercial and industrial waste diversion and circular economy efforts in West Michigan.

Creating a Circular Economy: A circular economy is a regenerative system in which resource inputs, waste, emissions, and energy leakage are minimized by slowing, closing, and narrowing material and energy loops. We will work to help local businesses understand the economic opportunity associated with solid waste, such as the nearly \$400 million of material disposed in Michigan landfills each year.

Objective 1: Promote a circular economy mindset and the understanding that waste has economic value by leveraging and expanding research products, education, demonstration projects, and market development.

Objective 2: Reduce food waste in West Michigan by supporting efforts to increase adoption of relevant diversion efforts, fill gaps in infrastructure, and promote source reduction programs.

Climate Leadership - 1



Help the West Michigan business community understand and respond to climate change.

Climate Change Mitigation: Business has a unique opportunity to significantly reduce the generation of greenhouse gases, which are the primary driver of climate change. As a gathering of West Michigan businesses and organizations, many with national or international ties, who are passionate about sustainability, WMSBF can lead the way in this effort.

Objective 1: Normalize discussions of climate change in business and organizational settings. We will accomplish this through various educational opportunities and by highlighting the commitment of local organizations to address climate change.

Objective 2: Identify and fill gaps in local greenhouse gas mitigation efforts, complementing existing programs and partners, facilitating linkages, and developing need-based solutions.

Climate Leadership - 2



Help the West Michigan business community understand and respond to climate change.

Climate Change Adaptation: We will be the local resource for businesses and organizations interested in identifying and minimizing vulnerabilities to climate change impacts to business operations. We will continue to maintain a strong link between the organization and the scientific community to stay abreast of emerging issues and trends.

Objective 1: Educate businesses and other stakeholders on their operational vulnerabilities to climate change and encourage adoption of science-based adaptation strategies, decision making, and continuity planning.

Objective 2: Develop regional capacity for climate adaptation strategies involving green infrastructure and low impact development, along with increased connectivity between local organizations and their water assets.

Corporate Social Responsibility - 1



Emphasize the need for corporate investment in social responsibility and social equity

Corporate Social Responsibility: We will become the region's leader for corporate social responsibility education, resources and networking, ensuring that the third leg of the triple bottom line is represented in sustainability discussions.

Objective 1: Promote and support social responsibility as a part of organizational sustainability plans.

Objective 2: Create and maintain relevant benchmarks for corporate social responsibility in West Michigan, and for local companies against those in other regions.

Objective 3: Target CSR professionals not actively involved in environmental issues for inclusion in WMSBF.

Corporate Social Responsibility - 2



Emphasize the need for corporate investment in social responsibility and social equity

Equitable Sustainability: We will work to make the industry and practice of sustainability more inclusive and seek ways to leverage sustainable business on behalf of the disadvantaged.

Objective 1: Identify and address gaps in environmental strategies and assess whether social impacts are being accurately valued in sustainability discussions locally and by local enterprises abroad.

Objective 2: Promote diversity and inclusion within the sustainability field, identifying and addressing challenges to and opportunities for entry of minority professionals and minority-owned businesses.

Objective 3: Promote adoption of sustainable business practices by minority-owned businesses, and facilitate access to sustainability resources for minority-owned businesses. Define potential for minority-owned business owners and entrepreneurs to enter the sustainability field or related markets.