

**VISION ACTION NETWORK  
SUSTAINABILITY ORGANIZATION FEASIBILITY STUDY**

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***Vision Action Network***  
**Sustainability Organization Feasibility Study**  
**Final Report**  
**Executive Summary**

***Overview***

Vision Action Network (VAN) commissioned a Sustainability Organization Feasibility Study as a follow up to the outcomes of a January 2007 Sustainability Conference they sponsored with other community organizations. The purpose of the study is to:

- research relevant data and background materials on existing sustainability organizations;
- identify important issues and opportunities surrounding sustainability;
- assess the need for, and interest in, creating a structure to coordinate sustainability efforts within the community of Washington County; and
- provide guidance on alternatives to local decision-makers regarding the functions, structure, funding and metrics of a sustainability entity.

This report summarizes the findings of the research, interviews, focus groups and Leadership Team (LT) meetings, which conclude that there is a desire for a sustainability entity to provide a variety of functions, including coordination, education, research, information and referral, and benchmarking. The report examines various functions and organizational forms, as well as funding options. The LT is charged with making the final decision about a sustainability entity in Washington County after review and discussion of the results of this report.

Consultants Cogan Owens Cogan (COC) and AXIS Performance Advisors, Inc. (Axis) conducted research, seven interviews, two focus groups and three meetings with a Leadership Team (LT), composed of elected and appointed officials, convened by VAN. Overseeing the study is the Operations Team (OT) composed of VAN, SOLV, Clean Water Services and Tualatin Valley Water District staff. The outcome of these tasks is to provide information to the Leadership Team to facilitate an informed discussion and decision on whether to institute a sustainability entity in Washington County.

***Need***

The need to coordinate sustainability efforts was strongly expressed by both interviewees and focus groups. All but two of the interviewees and focus group participants agreed that some form of sustainability entity is needed within the county. There was, naturally, a variety of needs identified that such an entity could address.

***Functions***

A key question of this study is: "What functions should a sustainability entity assume?" It is important to note that functions will ultimately guide the organizational form. Based on the perspectives of participants, recommended functions are identified that focus on coordination, public outreach, education, green building, recycling, water use, energy conservation, recognition and awards, benchmarking and metrics, and collaboration across sectors.

### ***What Type of Entity?***

Based on interviews, focus groups and LT discussions, the forms of entity most often mentioned are non-profit and intergovernmental organizations. The question for consideration is what form would best serve the needs of the community? The LT and some interviewees favored an intergovernmental organization. Focus groups and some interviewees expressed interest in some form of a non-governmental organization that is inclusive, broad-based and collaborative.

### ***Funding Options***

Potential funding for a sustainability organization can come from a variety of sources. Establishment of the legal entity for the organization is crucial to determining the funding sources available.

If the sustainability entity is organized under an intergovernmental agreement, the bulk of funding will likely be provided by the jurisdictions who participate in the agreement. A number of large corporations are located within Washington County and could participate in a sustainability organization financially.

Funding of a non-profit could be through donations, corporate contributions, philanthropic grants or government grants. A membership organization could establish fees, payable on an annual basis or charge for services.

Other funding may be available from a variety of federal, state, regional, philanthropic and other sources.

### ***Conclusions***

The consulting team has provided research and background information on a number of options for a sustainability entity. Based upon the feedback of Washington County stakeholders, a sustainability organization is desired.

Two preferred alternatives for an organizational form are presented: non-profit and intergovernmental.

Funding alternatives are recommended in the report, but which will be pursued will depend on the organizational form chosen by the Leadership Team.

Next steps include assessing interest more fully, and decision-making about functions, form, membership and funding. Once these are decided, establishing the organization and developing a strategic and business plan for a three-year period with a sunset provision is recommended to test the concept and assess the benefits.

# ***Vision Action Network***

## **Sustainability Organization Feasibility Study**

### **Final Report**

#### **OVERVIEW**

Vision Action Network (VAN) commissioned a Sustainability Organization Feasibility Study as a follow up to the outcomes of an January 2007 Sustainability Conference they sponsored with other community organizations. The purpose of the study is to:

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This report summarizes the findings of the research, interviews, focus groups and Leadership Team (LT) meetings, which conclude that there is a desire for a sustainability entity to provide a variety of functions, including coordination, education, research, information and referral, and benchmarking. The report examines various functions and organizational forms, as well as funding options. The LT is charged with making the final decision about a sustainability entity in Washington County after review and discussion of the results of this report.

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#### **METHODOLOGY**

The first meeting of the LT provided an overview of sustainability<sup>1</sup> (Appendix A), reviewed research on sustainability organizations (Appendix B)<sup>2</sup> and identified issues to address in stakeholder interviews and focus groups. Discussion in the meeting also addressed sustainability issues of importance to the LT and how best to address them in upcoming tasks. The Oregon Sustainability Act provided a working definition of sustainability that participants could utilize in discussions and interviews.

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<sup>1</sup> “Sustainability means using, developing and protecting resources in a manner that enables people to meet current needs and provides that future generations can also meet future needs, from the joint perspective of environmental, economic and community objectives” - *Oregon Sustainability Act*

<sup>2</sup> Additional research by Metro staff on region-wide sustainability activities was received toward the end of the project. This information is included in Appendix B.

Two focus groups and seven one-on-one interviews with key stakeholders were held, for a total participant count of 27 people. The interviews and focus groups were held during the week of October 15 - 19, 2007.

The purpose of the stakeholder outreach and interviews was to:

- identify important issues and opportunities surrounding sustainability
- assess the need for, and interest in creating a structure to coordinate sustainability efforts within the community of Washington County

The questions used for both interviews and focus groups included:

- 1) *What are the chief sustainability issues faced by your community and organization?*
- 2) *What are the chief sustainability opportunities that are being worked on by your organization?*
  - a) *What are the chief sustainability opportunities you would like to see be addressed?*
- 3) *Given these issues and opportunities, are there existing entities in Washington County, that you are aware of, you think address these (sustainability opportunities)?*
  - a) *What should a sustainability entity be charged with doing, and*
  - b) *Who should be at the table?*
  - c) *If no entity currently exists, what form, e.g. network, organization or program would be desirable?*
- 4) *How important is it to your community that such an entity exists?*  
*Very important   Somewhat important   Somewhat unimportant   Very unimportant*
- 5) *How might you (or your organization) participate in a local sustainability effort or entity?*
- 6) *How might such an entity, e.g. organization, program or network be funded?*
- 7) *Are there any other resources, Web sites, organizations, etc. you think would be of interest for our research? Please identify them here.*

In the second meeting, the LT reviewed a summary report (Appendix E) of the results of the one-on-one interviews with elected officials and business leaders, and two focus groups. Participants responded to questions concerning key sustainability issues, whether or not to form a sustainability entity in Washington County, roles and activities such an entity should engage in, participants and funding sources. After coming to consensus on establishing some form of entity, the discussion centered on focus of the entity and what form it should take, accountability, strategy for its creation, roles and funding.

Based on LT guidance, an intergovernmental agreement and non-profit organization were identified as the two alternatives exploration. This report examines the characteristics of the two models in terms of governance, legal requirements, participating sectors, process and procedures, roles and responsibilities, and funding options and sources. Specific examples of each model are identified and recommendations are made on implementation in Washington County.

## NEED FOR AN ORGANIZATION

### *Differing Needs in Washington County*

The need to coordinate sustainability efforts was strongly expressed by both interviewees and focus groups. All but two of the interviewees and focus group participants agreed that some form of sustainability entity is needed within the county. There was, naturally, a variety of needs identified that such an entity could address.

There were some differing definitions of need among public, private, and non-governmental representatives. Generally, public agencies, possibly because several already have sustainability initiatives underway, believe that there is a need for coordination and exchange of information on “best practices” in sustainability and outreach to the public. Some private and non-governmental representatives are more focused on the need for a sustainability vision and metrics as a framework for sustainability. Public agencies generally saw the need for an entity to serve as a convener of public agencies and utilities, while private and non-governmental representatives believe a broad public-private or public-nongovernmental partnership is needed.

There appears to be agreement that major challenges such as climate change, carbon management, peak oil pricing, water conservation, and recycling need to be addressed across all sectors. There is also a recognition that a sustainability entity would be beneficial for the county in a variety of ways including efficient sharing of information and promoting cooperation.

There is currently a Sustainability Network of Washington County group. However, this group may not be the appropriate setting for a more formal organizational structure. Almost all participating stakeholders voiced the need for a broader organization, one that links together the diverse sustainability efforts taking place within the county.

In summary, there is a **strong** majority opinion, among study participants, to support some form of sustainability entity for Washington County. Without one, informal networks may continue to form and operate, but leave out key stakeholders and lack cohesiveness. They may also **lack** the capacity to engage, encourage and **support** structured cooperation and integration of efforts aimed at promoting, measuring and celebrating sustainability efforts.

## FUNCTIONS

A key question of this study is: “What functions should a sustainability entity assume?” It is important to note that functions will ultimately guide the organizational form.

### *Functions/Roles of Some West Coast Sustainability Organizations*

The list below highlights roles that other sustainability organizations play based on the consultant’s research. The full list is shown in Appendix B. These include:

- Defining sustainability visions and guiding principles
- Setting indicators; measuring impacts

- Working with city (ies)/county (ies) to open channels of communication with service agencies
- Education and outreach
- Green Buildings and neighborhoods (green building, streetscapes and infrastructure)
- Sustainable economic development
- Recycling strategies and programs
- Zero Waste (waste reduction & reuse, recycling, composting, public disposal)
- Global warming action plan
- Peak oil policy
- Pursuing use of renewable energy
- BEST awards (Businesses for Energy & Sustainable Tomorrow)
- BEST business center in partnership with Energy Trust
- Environmental justice (energy, air quality, food security, health, land use)
- Toxics reduction (pest management, hazardous materials, home & body products)
- Urban nature (trees, parks and open spaces animals)
- Water management, use/reuse (waste and storm water, water conservation)
- Energy use (climate change, cleaner fuels & vehicles, driving alternatives)
- Air quality and transportation (pollution prevention, cleaner fuels & vehicles, driving alternatives)
- Planning: urban development, redevelopment, economic development, housing:
  - 1) Sustainable agency operations, working with city and county staff to green up processes;
  - 2) Sustainable economic development plan,
  - 3) Sustainable indicators (partnered with Portland State University) that would resonate with the public –
  - 4) Establishing performance indicators e.g. number of trees planted in the city; revised zoning and building codes, interpretations
- Coordinating a learning and support group for agency personnel that have sustainability as part or all of their job assignments

### ***Washington County Priority Functions***

A number of functions or roles that a sustainability entity could assume were identified through stakeholder research and the LT discussions. The LT and stakeholders suggested the following priorities. There are many more potential roles, as noted above, that can be performed by a sustainability organization or entity. These appear to have the most interest and support.

- Government purchasing coordination
- Coordination of existing organization, business, agency sustainability efforts
- Web site with links to member organizations, sustainability information sites and other relevant sites
- Centralized sustainability information sharing and referral,
- Recycling (enhanced and specialized services)
- Education (including business, public, interagency, academic institutions)
- Green Building (LEED or other) standards and information
- Water supply, storm water management and conservation
- Land use and transportation planning, trip reduction strategies, incentives
- Metrics/Benchmarking
- Research and sharing “best practices”

- Recognition of best practices/awards
- Regulatory vs. non-regulatory roles to be assumed by an organization

There is an interest in sharing best practices across several functions. Concern about whether there is a regulatory component to a sustainability entity or not was expressed by one member of the LT. This issue is addressed below under the section “Regulatory vs. Non-regulatory Roles”.

### ***Priority Focus Areas***

At its October 2007 meeting, the Leadership Team expressed a desire to choose a few top-tier priorities for roles of a sustainability entity. Interviewees and focus group participants, with a few exceptions, identified similar goals. Such priority roles will help to define the organizational structure and funding.

#### *Government Purchasing Coordination*

The Leadership Team expressed an interest in a coordinated sustainability purchasing program. Examples exist locally of jurisdictions implementing such a program, but not on a county-wide basis. In 2006, Portland City Council adopted a resolution to create the Sustainable City Government Partnership. This is an example of a collaborative citywide effort to integrate sustainable practices and resource efficiency into municipal operations. The City of Portland also has a sustainable purchasing initiative. Washington County’s local jurisdictions can review how this partnership is operating and perhaps examine joining in adoption of an inter-governmental approach to purchasing.

Although not a purchaser’s group, the metro area Sustainable Products Purchasers Coalition demonstrates the desire of purchasers to buy sustainable products. See <http://www.sppcoalition.org/text/about.html> for more details.

#### *Coordination of Existing Sustainability Efforts*

The coordination function was high on the list of all participants. There is an interest in bringing together public and private sectors, non-profits, faith and other communities of interest around sustainability efforts. The existing Sustainability Network of Washington County is a good resource for initial contacts for coordination. See <http://www.vision-west.org/sustain8.htm> for more details.

#### *Web Site*

A Web site for the sustainability entity can be developed and cover a number of informational needs. Through Visible Strategies, a Vancouver, B.C. based company, a site that links the goals, objectives and strategies of the entity and conveys progress in measuring the impacts of sustainability-related efforts can be developed. The City of Beaverton is currently working with Visible Strategies’ **see-it**™ technology on such a site. See <http://beavertoncentral.visiblestrategies.com/>. See Appendix D.

Links to sponsoring, supporting and related organizations can be provided. Content on local sustainability topics can be provided either as new content or through links to other sources.

### Centralized Information Sharing, Public Education

There is no “one-stop shopping” within the county to link public, businesses, non-profits and government offices to sustainability information. Having a dedicated single gateway or coordinator of sustainability education, information and referral can save valuable time and resources for a multitude of organizations and residents.

A number of examples exist of single purpose education and information and referral services. Currently a number of groups and agencies provide these services in Washington County. Such agencies include Solid Waste and Recycling, Clean Water Services, water districts, Vision Action Network, the OSU Extension Service, Hillsboro and Tigard Resource Centers, and other individual cities. Many other private companies answer recycling, agriculture, forestry and energy conservation questions. These efforts, however, are not linked.

### Academic Education

There are two components to the topic of academic education. First, is public or staff education-- providing information and training on sustainability topics. Secondly, is the coordination with educational institutions in their sustainability programs. One such program is Cascadia Regional Institute for Sustainability Education (C-Rise), led by Portland Community College. There are also sustainability coordinators in each of the regional higher education institutions and academic programs focused on sustainability topics are rapidly expanding. An opportunity exists to use the programs already established by these institutions to help inform businesses and other organizations in pursuing sustainability strategies on small and large-scale bases.

### Recycling

Recycling was mentioned by several stakeholders as an area to be addressed by an entity. Information on recycling, and especially of electronic equipment, as well as support of recycling industries was identified as important. Bringing together industry, government, and the public to enhance and coordinate recycling services and provide information and referral is a role that an entity can undertake.

### Green Building Standards

In the LT meetings, interviews and focus groups, the consulting team heard from public and private sector participants that education on, and coordination and implementation of, green building standards is a service that they would like to see made available. Jurisdictions use the International Building Code (IBC) and the State of Oregon administers and interprets the codes that builders must follow in constructing their projects. There are also several green building rating systems such as the LEED program of the US Green Building Council that are gaining market share.

Participants expressed the need to advocate for changes in the codes to allow green building practices to gain in construction, public works and building code/inspection.

The consulting team heard from both the interviewees and LT that a forum for coordinating people involved in green building in Washington County is desired. One example is the Cascadia, or C-RISE (Regional Institute for Sustainability Education) program at the Sylvania Campus of Portland Community College. Another resource is the Cascadia Green Building Council. Metro, the regional government agency, might establish a green building hotline with investment from Washington County, city and other partners.

### Water Supply, Conservation and Stormwater Management

The Washington County water districts, watershed councils and Clean Water Services have taken leadership roles with regard to water-related sustainability issues. Including these community sustainability leaders is important. They are knowledgeable and a resource for sustainability leadership. There appears to be an opportunity to share expertise on water conservation and on-site storm water solutions across the County.

### Land Use and Transportation

Land use and transportation, in particular, are broad and tied to many facets of the sustainability umbrella. Several organizations within the region address these concerns: Metro, local planning agencies, Westside Economic Alliance, Westside Transportation Alliance, Tri-Met and others.

### Metrics/Benchmarking

Benchmarks for several organizations, based upon county-wide sustainability goals, can be developed through a sustainability organization. These benchmarks will help in determining if goals are being met and the strategies being used successful. An example of metrics being used is in the Beaverton Central efforts. Visible Strategies™ has developed **see-it**™, a Web site that shows community goals, objectives and strategies, then allows for recording and displaying of data gathered to measure the status of each one. See <http://beavertoncentral.visiblestrategies.com/> and Appendix D for more details.

### Research

Research into local sustainability issues can be conducted through academic partners, volunteers or staff dedicated to representing organizations within the sustainability entity, or coordinated through it for a variety of purposes. The research may tie in with other functions such as education, outreach, regulation or other needs.

### Recognition of Best Practices/Awards

By recognizing outstanding efforts toward sustainable practices, incentives can be used to encourage adoption of these practices and participation within businesses and organizations. This promotional activity can be important to individuals, businesses and organizations that enhance the community through their everyday actions. The BEST Awards (Businesses for Energy & Sustainable Tomorrow) and Washington County's GEARS award programs are examples of such a local programs.

### Regulatory vs. Non-regulatory Roles

The consulting team heard a couple of distinct messages during the feasibility study-- interviewees and focus group participants desired a non-profit, non-regulatory organization/entity. On the other hand, the LT suggested an intergovernmental organization with the option of a regulatory component of the entity being left on the table for discussion. Only governmental entities can assume a regulatory role in designing, implementing and legally enforcing sustainability-related codes or ordinances.

The options:

1. Non-profit/Non-regulatory
2. Intergovernmental/Non-regulatory
3. Intergovernmental/Regulatory

Whichever the chosen sustainability entity model is, the LT should recognize the federal, state and local regulations already in place and their relationships to sustainability practices. Within the governmental regulatory environment, compliance is assigned to the applicable agencies.

Having an additional regulatory agency focused on sustainability may be redundant or even counter-productive, depending on the goals desired. This should be carefully considered.

The educational component of regulatory compliance could, at a minimum, be a service provided by either a governmental or a non-profit sustainability entity.

**Table 1. Summary of Responses**

This table summarizes the input from stakeholders who participated in the study on their preferred organizational structure, governance, roles, membership and funding for a sustainability entity in Washington County.

**TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF RESPONSES: LEADERSHIP TEAM, INTERVIEWEES AND FOCUS GROUPS**

	<b>Leadership Team</b>	<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
<b>Organizational Structure</b>	Local, inter-jurisdictional or public-private partnership	Non-governmental coordination organization	Responses ranged from tapping into existing resource like Metro, to using VAN or Coalition for a Livable Future as models.	Community-based organization
<b>Governance Roles</b>	IGA or Non-profit	Non-profit	Various	Non-regulatory
	Purchasing, education, centralized information & referral, coordination, green building-development standards	Global warming-Climate change, Building sustainable communities, Outreach, education, information sharing and networking opportunities, Advocacy for implementation strategies, such as revision of the statewide building code to allow sustainable building	Coordination, education, centralized information & referral, green building-development standards, recognition-awards	Coordination, use science-based analysis, access resources, education, create community vision and goals, measure success using a scorecard, metrics

	<b>Leadership Team</b>	<b>Interviewees</b>	<b>Group 1</b>	<b>Group 2</b>
		practices, securing a dedicated city water source, retraining employees with goal of instilling a sustainability ethic		
<b>Membership</b>	Public sector or public-private partnership	Inclusive, broad representation	Inclusive broad representation	Inclusive broad representation
<b>Funding</b>	Jurisdiction's contributions, fees, regional, state & federal grants	Fees, grants, contributions	Fees, grants, contributions	Fees, grants, contributions

Focus Group #1--composed primarily of business, city, county and agency personnel--expressed a desire to find a less structured way to focus community-wide sustainability efforts. They want to know where the public is in terms of readiness for discussion on issues like climate change and other sustainability topics and to assess public opinion about a sustainability organization. They wanted to tap into existing resources, such as Metro. They desire coordination and education functions to be a significant part of the charge for an entity as well.

Focus Group #2, a mixed group of private, non-profit and public sector representatives, had different priorities for urban and rural interest roles in a sustainability entity. While urban representatives discussed land use, transportation, sustainable economic development, water quality, recycling, community education and awards, the rural members addressed soil and water conservation, land use conflicts, farmer's markets and other rural-related components of sustainability. Though not exclusive to the rural constituency, these concerns had slightly more importance to the environmental, farm and faith community representatives. This group's ideas on functions/roles for a sustainability organization were more encompassing of a wide range of programs, services and community-based activities that crossed sectors and included the desire for a sustainability vision and the use of metrics to measure attainment of sustainability goals.

### **WHICH TYPE OF ENTITY?**

Based on interviews, focus groups and LT discussions, the types or forms of entity most often mentioned are non-profit and intergovernmental. The question for consideration is what form would best serve the needs of the community? The LT and some interviewees favored an intergovernmental organization. Two LT members favored a public-private partnership. Focus group and some interview participants expressed interest in some form of a non-governmental organization that is inclusive, broad-based and collaborative. Some discussion took place on the potential organizing role of Metro or Portland State University, but the LT decided to focus at the local county level. The option of seeking contributions and collaboration from these two organizations was left open for consideration.

The consulting team focused on intergovernmental and non-profit organization options. Each type of entity has its own advantages and disadvantages. The legal structure would dictate the activities that could or could not be undertaken. For example, an intergovernmental entity is unlikely to receive foundation or other charitable contributions. Non-profit organizations are generally precluded from lobbying. However, non-profits can accept public and private contributions, apply for philanthropic and governmental grants, and are not subject to the same public notice and open meeting laws as a governmental entity.

During the LT meetings the concept of having an organization that would sunset after a given period (3-5 years) was discussed. Several members suggested that a sunset provision would limit a long-term commitment to funding if the organizational structure did not function as intended. There was also consideration given to launching the initiative within an existing program or agency.

This chart summarizes the characteristics of the two types of organizations suggested by the LT for examination in this study.

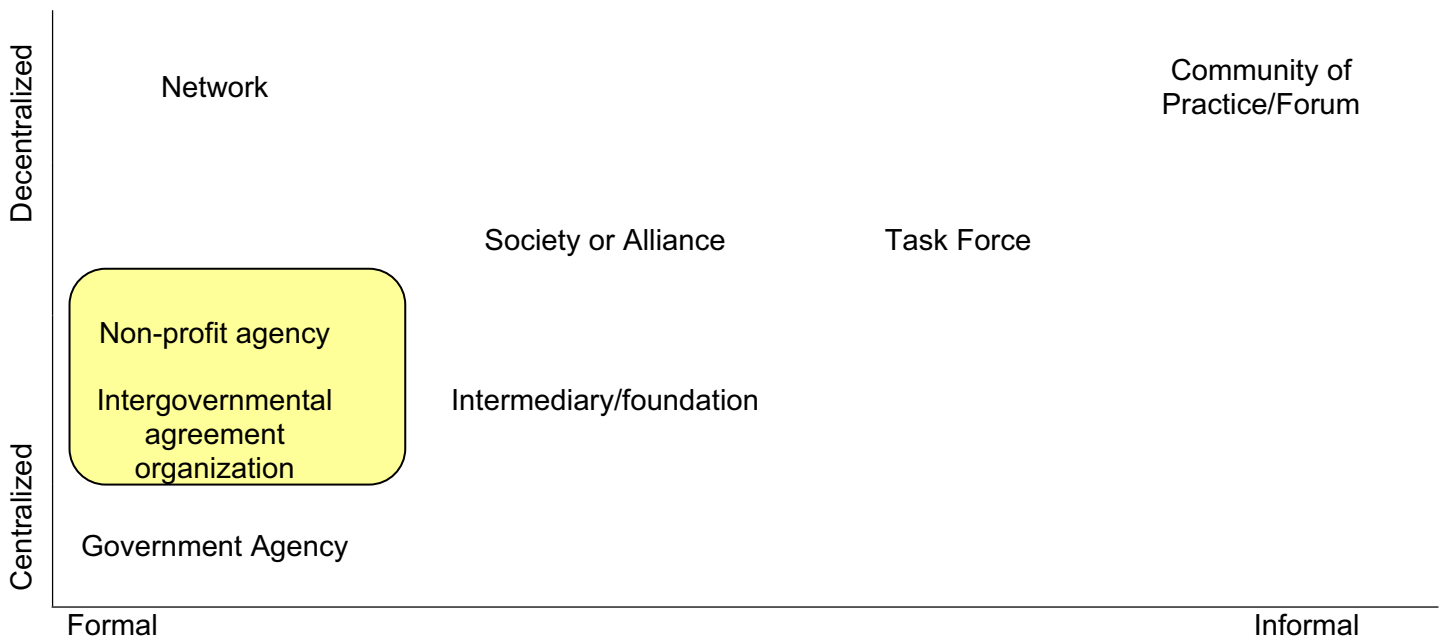
**TABLE 2. OPTIONS FOR A SUSTAINABILITY ORGANIZATION IN WASHINGTON COUNTY**

Characteristics	Non-Profit	Intergovernmental
<b>Governance/ Decision-making</b>	Board of Directors, non-regulatory <b>Example:</b> <i>Sustainable North Carolina (SNC) &amp; Sustainable Seattle have each a board of directors and provide support to members.</i>	Council, Commission, Committee, Board; non-regulatory, advisory group <b>Example:</b> <i>Multnomah/Portland Sustainable Development Commission (SDC)</i>
<b>Participating Sectors</b>	Private, public, non-profit, academic, business <b>Example:</b> <i>SNC appears to be mostly focused on business but has both business and government members, as well as participation of universities, institutions and non-profits.</i>	Public, private, academic representatives. Members selected by participating jurisdictions <b>Example:</b> <i>SDC</i>
<b>Legal Structure, Process &amp; Procedures</b>	Articles of Incorporation under Oregon law, federal and state registration as a non-profit organization, adopted bylaws open or closed meetings, majority rule, consensus model, informed consent model(See Appendices G & H)	Government agencies agree to form organization, intergovernmental agreement approved by participants. Subject to open public meetings, Administrative Procedures Act. (See Appendix I)
<b>Roles &amp; Responsibilities</b>	<b>Non-regulatory:</b> Coordination, networking/ events, education, information & referral, community-based social marketing, advocacy, grant administration, metrics, benchmark reporting, research, promotion, awards <b>Example:</b> <i>Sustainable Seattle focuses on education and indicators and has an award program;</i>	<b>Non-regulatory:</b> interagency/intergovernmental planning, program coordination, education, information & referral, metrics, setting benchmarks, reporting <b>Regulatory:</b> Setting standards, certification criteria, metrics, setting benchmarks, reporting, enforcement <b>Example:</b> <i>Clean Water Services, Lane</i>

Characteristics	Non-Profit	Intergovernmental
	<i>Sustainable North Carolina provides education, networking and an award program</i>	<i>Co. Council of Governments, SDC</i>
<b>Funding</b>	Membership or utilization fees, private and business contributions, grants (philanthropic, governmental)	Governmental grants (federal, state, regional), intergovernmental contributions

When the consulting team researched organizations related to sustainability, the organizations were graphed on two axes: the degree of centralization or decentralization, and degree of formality or informality. Based on the results of the interviews and focus groups, it appears that what most study participants want is something fairly formal but not centralized or regulatory in nature. However, as mentioned earlier, one LT member asked that regulation be kept on the table for discussion. We have shaded the general location of where a desired entity falls on the chart below.

**FIGURE 1. AUTHORITY/RELATIONSHIP MATRIX**



**Examples of Non-Profit Sustainability Organization**

A Board of Directors governs a non-profit. The board’s role is to determine the mission and strategies used to accomplish it, provide direction for committees, fundraising, monitoring the performance and impact of the organization, ensuring fiscal responsibility, selecting and monitoring staff (if any), and supporting the overall organization. Volunteers are key to the success of any non-profit. Board members should have a high level of commitment to the mission and entity.

Composition of a non-profit board should be carefully considered as the issue of sustainability involves a wide cross-section of individuals, organizations and sectors.

The success of the organization rides on inclusion and the ability to hear and address the priorities of the group. Non-profits are independent organizations solely responsible to their Board of Directors.

Two comparable sustainability organizations that most closely align with the purposes described by the LT are summarized below--Sustainable North Carolina and Sustainable Seattle. Vision Action Network, which is a Washington County non-profit model, is another example, though with a much broader charge than sustainability issues.

These organizations have relatively small staffs and benefit from multiple funding sources.

Neither of the sustainability organizations precisely matches the desired purpose(s) reflected by the LT, focus groups and interviewee who participated in this project. However, they do provide proof-of-concept as well as viable funding and structural models.

#### *Sustainable North Carolina*

Founded in 1998 as a 501(c) (3), Sustainable North Carolina's purpose is to accelerate the adoption of practices that optimize economic prosperity, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. Their funding comes largely from memberships and corporate sponsorships, although a grant helped fund its creation and they are currently pursuing a grant for a specific program. See Appendix C for more information.

#### *Sustainable Seattle*

Sustainable Seattle was started by citizens that wanted to measure sustainability in their community. They never developed an official relationship with city government. The organization is all privately funded, approximately 70 percent by foundations and the rest from individual contributions. Their purpose is to be a catalyst for sustainability and currently their focus is on enabling individuals to make sustainable choices.

#### ***Example of Intergovernmental Collaboration***

The formation of an intergovernmental organization would include existing jurisdictions under an Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) umbrella. Representation could be limited to participating jurisdictions or there could be a structure set up to invite voting or non-voting members-at-large or non-profit representatives.

The advantages of having an IGA in place are that it defines expectations for participation, responsibilities, including monetary contributions, procedures, administrative responsibilities, and a sunset clause (if desired).

The disadvantages of an IGA are that there are limitations on what funding sources can be pursued and what programs and activities can be funded. There is also the need to adhere to strict recordkeeping, open public meeting laws and the State Administrative Procedures Act.

#### ***Options for Staffing***

1. Each agency/group dedicates some amount of staff time, but not a new FTE staff member within an existing organization or agency.

2. Appoint one or two staff members in a single agency/organization as a county-wide sustainability coordinator, funded from IGA member jurisdictions.
3. Hire new staff member(s) within a completely new organization or department or division.

A copy of the City of Portland/Multnomah County Sustainable Development Commission IGA is attached as Appendix I. This model has the Commission addressing a policy and program advisory functions with both the City and County, without decision-making authority on regulatory matters. The Commission is composed of seventeen members appointed by the jurisdictions; ten from the City and seven from the County. The Portland Office of Sustainable Development and the Multnomah County Sustainability Initiative staff the Commission.

## FUNDING

Potential funding for a sustainability organization can come from a variety of sources. Establishment of the legal entity under which the organization will fall is crucial to determining the funding sources available. Building organizational capacity would be the next step. Grants for core support of sustainability organizations are less available and harder to find. We have identified some funding options for such an organization or entity.

Funding that is dedicated to specific topical initiatives will probably be easier to obtain through funds for general support. Grants for agricultural, forestry, food security, land use, transportation, toxics, green building, energy use, water resources, research, education, etc. are easily researched and possibly obtained.

### ***Potential Funding Sources***

If the sustainability entity is organized under an intergovernmental agreement, the bulk of funding will likely be provided by the jurisdictions who participate in the agreement. A number of large corporations are located within Washington County and could participate in a sustainability organization financially.

Funding of a non-profit could be through donations, corporate contributions, philanthropic grants or government grants. A membership organization could establish fees, payable on an annual basis or charge for services. Other funding may be available from a variety of federal, state, regional, philanthropic and other sources including the following:

The **Urban Land Institutes'** Community Action Grants of up to \$25,000 are available to fund non-profit and public projects that foster creative, innovative community outreach, research, or education programs. Sustainability and community building fall within the grant criteria and categories for funding. Grant cycles for 2008 are in March and September. See [http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=My Community](http://www.uli.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=My+Community) for more details.

The **Meyer Memorial Trust** administers Responsive, Capacity Building and Grassroots grants for a variety of causes and non-profits. Grant cycles vary by the type of grant sought and have quarterly submission cycles. See [http://www.mmt.org/grants\\_programs/](http://www.mmt.org/grants_programs/) for more information.

The **M. J. Murdock Charitable Trust** serves the Pacific Northwest with a focus on education, arts and culture and scientific research grants. Funding for leadership development, increasing organizational capacity and more is also available. See <http://www.murdock-trust.org/> for more details.

**Jesse Smith Noyes Foundation** <http://www.noyes.org/apply.html> makes grants for sustainability organizations. This foundation would be appropriate for grants to address issues related to sustainable agricultural and food systems.

**Intel**, with a large presence in Washington County, has a grant program with a focus on environmental issues. See <http://www.intel.com/community/grant.htm> for more details.

**Oregon Community Foundation** provides competitive community grants. See [http://www.ocf1.org/grant\\_programs/grant\\_programs.html](http://www.ocf1.org/grant_programs/grant_programs.html) for more details.

The federal **Environmental Protection Agency Environmental Education Grants** may be the source for funds related to sustainability education. See [http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants\\_apply.html](http://www.epa.gov/enviroed/grants_apply.html) for more details. Closing date for 2008 is 12/20/07.

From *Sustainable Design for Nonprofit Organizations: Finding Funding to Support Sustainability* by Holly Lennihan:

### **Bank of America**

“Grants for programs that foster sustainable practices on a community level often focus on convening leaders from the public and private sectors. The goal of many of these program (sic) is to create consensus about how to best articulate long-term goals with respect to sustainability. One example is the Bank of America's partnership with the Urban Land Institute to promote ‘smart growth.’”

### **Kresge Foundation**

“Since 2003, the Michigan-based Kresge Foundation, through its Green Building Initiative, has awarded 64 planning grants totaling more than \$4.1 million “to increase the awareness of sustainable or green building practices among nonprofits and [to] encourage them to consider building green. The foundation, which is known for its challenge grants for capital projects, is an early proponent of sustainable design practices for nonprofits, and as such offers a nice range of educational materials on its Web site, including three case studies.”

## **MEASURING SUCCESS**

Measuring success of any organization can be challenging. In each of the stakeholder focus groups, the consulting team heard that measuring the success of sustainability efforts is important. There are many components to measuring the impacts of sustainable practices including economic health, community benefits, environmental health, and social well-being. Developing the metrics that reflect the values of county residents and businesses can be an important task of the sustainability organization.

The chart on the following page shows the top 13 sustainability strategies that make the most impact on communities. When assessing the roles and responsibilities of a sustainability entity, the chart is used to help prioritize goals, objectives, implementation strategies, and resources available. It can also help in measuring success. As mentioned under the Web site discussion above, the **see-it**™ tool by Visible Strategies is an innovative way to measure, record and report on impacts (Appendix D).

Such Web-based software can display goals, strategies, actions, performance measures and serve as a vehicle for stakeholder involvement.

**TABLE 3. Oregon Sustainability Board Toolkit**

From AXIS Performance Advisors, Inc. [www.axisperformance.com](http://www.axisperformance.com)  
<http://www.sustainableoregon.net/oregon/toolkit>

**Top Strategies to Make Communities and Government More Sustainable** - Governmental agencies that pursue sustainability endeavor to simultaneously improve the health of their economy, their community and the environment. This site provides advice and best practices for the most powerful strategies. This site provides links to best practices, policies and programs. Browse through these strategies, pick one to work on, and then come back to select another.

**Sustainability strategies with the biggest impact.** The following chart lists the top sustainability strategies cities and counties can take and show the primary benefits each should provide. Because everything is interconnected, every strategy can impact all the benefits listed in columns below. We have shown with X\_s the *primary* benefits for each strategy. These are only general guidelines as arguments could be made to add or delete X\_s. On the web site, click on any strategy to learn more about it and get links to best practices (policies and programs.)

Strategy	Human Health	Livability	Economic	Climate Change	Natural Resources	Species Protection
1. Greenhouse Gases Plans	X	X	X	X	X	X
2. Green Building	X	X	X	X	X	X
3. Energy Efficiency	X	X	X	X		
4. Renewable Energy	X		X	X		
5. Alternative Fuels	X		X	X		
6. Transportation Options	X	X		X		
7. Green Purchasing	X		X	X	X	X
8. Waste Reduction			X	X	X	
9. Toxics Reduction	X		X		X	X
10. Water Quality	X				X	X
11. Water Conservation			X		X	X
12. Land Preservation/Greenspace	X	X	X	X	X	X
13. Sustainability Planning	X	X	X	X	X	X

## CONCLUSIONS

This research project is intended to answer a series of questions:

- Is there a need for an entity to coordinate sustainability efforts in Washington County?
- What would it do?
- What type or form of organization should be considered?
- How would it be funded?

### ***Is there a need?***

The answer to the first question is a qualified 'yes.' When asked how important is it to your community that this (entity) happen? Fifteen focus group members and interviewees indicated that it was very important, and eight indicated it is somewhat important; three participants indicated it is somewhat not important. None said it was not important.

Throughout this study, the consulting team heard that it would be important for the Washington County communities to be served by a sustainability entity. There is also a clear trend among existing public and private (major employer) organizations within the county, region and globally to increase their interest in, and capacity to address sustainability issues.

### ***What would it do?***

Answers to this question ranged widely and varied based on the perspective of the participants in the interviews and focus groups. Those in government saw a need to help their own agencies be more sustainable, coordinate dissemination of "best practices" information, and provide coordinated outreach to the community. The cross-sector focus group tended to see opportunities to set a broader strategic agenda for the county, setting benchmarks for the future, and collaborate and coordinate across sectors.

There are ranges of possibilities for such an entity including developing and managing:

- A sustainability vision and guiding principles
- Metrics and benchmarks
- Research applied to local sustainability challenges
- Focused initiatives to advance subjects such a recycling, water conservation, green building and development across organizations
- Sharing "best practices" among organizations on specific subjects
- Conference, workshops, education and training programs
- Public outreach
- Award and recognition programs
- Participation in similar efforts in the region, nationally, and internationally
- Web page connectivity (See Visible Strategies work in Beaverton, <http://beavertoncentral.visblestrategies.com> )

- Clearinghouse for information and resources on sustainability

Most participants were quite adamant that this body should not be regulatory, although it could provide research for and advice to regulatory bodies.

### ***What type of organization should be considered?***

Based on focus groups, interviews, and discussions with the Leadership Team, the consulting team recommends two types of organizations for consideration. (See pp. 12-15 for more detail.)

Option 1. Intergovernmental agreement organization. This type of organization is familiar to local government officials, and is created by intergovernmental agreement among the participating public agencies. Such an organization would focus on public agency needs and issues. The best example of this model is the Portland-Multnomah Sustainable Development Commission.

Option 2. Non-governmental organization. This type of entity could be structured similarly to the Vision Action Network but with a different set of purposes. The best examples of this model are Sustainable Seattle and Sustainable North Carolina.

The consulting team believes either type of organization could serve the county well and there are ways the two models might be combined. For example, an intergovernmental agreement organization could create a coordinating body to set priorities, incubate further initiatives and develop a business plan or strategic plan for the future. Funding from non-governmental sources could be sought through an existing non-profit organization or academic institution as partners for specific projects.

### ***How would it be funded?***

Discussions on how the entity should be funded were understandably non-committal. Interviews and focus groups identified a broad range of possibilities. The Leadership Team, in discussing an intergovernmental agreement organization, identified the potential of several public agencies contributing funds and/or loaned personnel. The consulting team identified several potential funding sources for a sustainability organization. Generally, a government-led organization may not be eligible for the same philanthropic or tax-deductible funding as a private non-profit. Private non-profits may be excluded from applying for certain federal, state, regional or local grants.

### ***Next steps***

Based on these findings, we believe the most productive path forward is to:

1. Identify the parties, among the Leadership Team, that care enough about creating such an entity that they are willing to put forth time and/or money to make it happen. The core of this initiative appears to be the public sector agencies.
2. Identify resources (financial and personnel) necessary to manage the incubation process.
3. Go through a chartering process to scope out its purpose and services. Decide if it should be chartered as an intergovernmental agreement organization or a private non-profit, or some combination over time.

4. Develop a clear but flexible set of purposes for the organization and do not limit the scope unnecessarily.
5. Shop the idea around to others who might come on board, help fund or provide other resources.
6. Develop a funding plan for a three-year period with a sunset provision.
7. Legally charter the organization either as an intergovernmental agreement or non- governmental organization.
8. Launch the organization.
9. Develop a strategic plan and business plan for the first three years of operation.

### ***Possible Additional Research for the Leadership Team***

Additional research for consideration by the Leadership Team can:

1. Determine the interest among large employers and major institutions in forming, funding or participating in a sustainability organization.
2. Determine if it is possible to leverage existing funding or current functions to initiate the entity (e.g., recycling or energy conservation programs)
3. Determine the interests of the general public. A question might be added to a survey initiated for other purposes to gauge public support and interest.
4. Define a contact person at Portland State University, Oregon Graduate Institute, and/or Portland Community College to consider as key partners.
5. Define the role desired for Metro to play and their willingness to play it.