

# Sustainable Pittsburgh

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## Organization

Sustainable Pittsburgh's (SP) mission is to: "...affect decision-making in the Pittsburgh region so that it integrates economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental quality. Sustainable Pittsburgh emphasizes long term and sustained quality of life for all citizens."

By funding sustainability-based projects and raising awareness of transportation, equity, land use, and environmental issues, SP hopes to influence policy makers and large businesses to adopt sustainability in their laws and practices.

## Facilities

SP has a small office in the Regional Enterprise Tower at 425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 1335 (downtown in the old Alcoa building). The central room, Amanda's office, is connected to a conference room and 4 other employee offices. Kim's office is then connected to an additional office, where an intern sometimes works, and the storage room, where they house some supplies and files.

## Programs

SP provides these programs to the community:

- **Regional Indicators Reports:** These are reports that were published in 2002 and 2004 which draw sustainability conclusions by examining indicators such as quality of environment, economic well-being, societal statistics (cost of living, poverty, unemployment, etc.) and access to health care.
- **Annual Smart Growth Conferences:** The Annual Smart Growth Conference is held yearly and addresses issues of sustainability that are typically addressed in the Regional Indicators Reports. Presentations are given by keynote speakers, and the conference is open to those who wish to pay a registration fee. Government officials and other policy makers, however, may attend at no cost.
- **Smart Growth Forums:** These are similar to the Smart Growth Conference, but on a smaller scale and roughly five times per year.
- **Great Outdoors Week:** In Partnership with Venture Outdoors, SP attempts to promote outdoors activities and provide information about how policy makers and businesses can help citizens find outdoors activities.
- **Sustainable Business Solutions:** SP funded an assessment of the Mall at Robinson in an attempt to improve sustainability on the local level by examining the use of storm water, energy, transportation, green building, etc. From this they hope to acquire funding for another similar project and increase exposure.
- **Champions of Sustainability:** Previous speeches of keynote speakers are recorded, and then they are broadcasted over radio by WDUQ 90.5 FM. Online recordings are also made available via podcasting.

## Staff

There are five full-time staff members, plus two interns.

- **Amanda Harber, Executive Administrator, CP:** Helps to coordinate information sharing between other staff members. Amanda is responsible for maintaining the website and assisting with necessary day to day operations. She filters phone calls and helps to foster good relations with outside connections. Amanda is comfortable with updating SP's website through FrontPage, and she is familiar with Microsoft Office (including querying and manipulation in Access), and she has been introduced to several programming languages. Overall, she is comfortable with both computer software and hardware.
- **Court Gould, Executive Director:** Court is visible to policy makers in that he often gives sustainability-related presentations and is invited to sit on councils. He decides which initiatives should be funded by Sustainable Pittsburgh, be they research-based or education-based. Technology-wise, Court works predominantly with Microsoft Office.
- **Kim Adams, Communications Manager:** Kim helps to maintain outside connections and also predominantly works with equity and amenities issues. She is the local expert on racial distribution and how it effects voting and sustainability as a whole. "Amenities" broadly covers any sort of outdoor recreation. Kim generally shows great interest in both computer software and hardware, and is comfortable with a digital environment. She regularly uses Microsoft Office (including Publisher, and running Access queries), and she knows how to use FrontPage. She sees great potential for Microsoft Outlook as a networking tool to coordinate meetings and work with distribution lists.
- **Joan Barlow, Assistant Director:** Joan is the land use expert. She looks for opportunities on how to improve the way land around Pittsburgh is currently used and ultimately seeks solutions that lead to sustainability. Additionally, Joan is SP's primary graphics person. She is comfortable with Microsoft Office (including querying in Access) and has a good degree of knowledge in varying graphics programs (Quarck, Photoshop). She also knows how to use FrontPage.
- **David Ginns, Transportation Specialist:** David is responsible for sustainable transportation. External connections seek his expertise when it comes to large scale public transportation issues or small scale questions of where a traffic stoplight should be placed. He knows just enough Microsoft Office to format documents, but he would like to learn how to more effectively use SP's database. David has almost no knowledge of computer hardware and is not interested in learning about it.
- **Susheela Nemani, Communications Intern:** Assists with research and provides technical knowledge. Primarily works with Kim.
- **Vladimir Mollov, intern:** Vladimir is working roughly until April to develop a website for the Transportation Funding Initiative (not-for-pay).

## Technical Environment

SP has the following technical assets:

### Equipment

- 6 desktop computers, each of which is roughly 5 years old. Data not backed up.
- 1 laptop computer, used for giving presentations
- 1 color printer in Joan's office
- 1 central B&W printer in central office
- Fax Machine
- Scanner

### Software

- Microsoft Office on every PC
- FrontPage on Amanda's computer
- Quark and Adobe Photoshop on Joan's computer
- Virus Scan software exists, but is 3 years out of date

### Database and Website

- Access to a server provided by Regional Enterprise Tower. SP's website and podcasting files are stored here, along with a database of 6000 contacts. Automatic backups are done by Expedient, SP's provider.
- Website ( <http://www.sustainablepittsburgh.org/> )

## Technology Management

Amanda, Kim, and Joan seem to have the most comfort and greatest interest in technology, while Court and David use it as a tool to complete necessary work. For technology problems that cannot be solved, SP members will find Chuck, who works with another non-profit down the hall. This, however, only happens several times a year.

Amanda is completely responsible for updating the website, by the requests of other staff members. The website itself contains many out-of-date links, is difficult to navigate, and does not appear professional.

3E Links, a mass e-mail sent weekly to those who expressed interested in receiving it, consists of a variety of links to articles that somehow involve sustainability. Each staff member compiles a series of sustainability-related links, or "resources." These are typically links to online news articles. Resources are then sent to Amanda along with a 3-line quotation from each source that describes what it is about.

Additionally, other non-profit organizations can ask to include their Event listings in 3E Links. These are also sent to Amanda.

After everything filters down to Amanda, she applies proper formatting. Court and Kim then edit for content, make cuts if necessary, and send it back to Amanda so that she can send the e-mail out to those listed in the database.

It is possible that the format of 3E Links could be improved. The Christmas edition asked readers to respond to a sustainability question, and only 1 of 2200 replied.

## **Technology Planning**

There is no technology plan, except for the mention of SP's website and 3E Links in their 2006 work plan. The work plan outlines such things as goals, strategies, outcomes, and objectives that relate to their website and 3E Links.

The budget contains very little that specifically relates to technology. SP does, however, budget for hosting services provided by Expedient and by consulting firms for specific projects that require the design of an informative website. For example, the interactive 2004 Regional Indicators Report can be found at [http://www.sustainablepittsburgh.org/NewFrontPage/2004\\_Indicators\\_Report.html](http://www.sustainablepittsburgh.org/NewFrontPage/2004_Indicators_Report.html). The site has a very different design than the rest of SP's website.

Amanda, Joan, and Kim believe that developing a technology plan will be incredibly helpful, while Court supports development but prefers to wait for a first draft.

## **Internal & External Communications**

### **Internal:**

Internal communications tend to be rather casual and supported by a combination of e-mail that provides a paper trail and "memory" of what should be done, and also through speech.

### **External:**

As for external communications, Sustainable Pittsburgh relies on a variety of mediums that include telephone conversations, conferences & forums, publications on their website, paper publications, and e-mail.

## **Information Management**

SP's database contains roughly 6000 contacts, 2200 of which have expressed a desire to receive 3E Links. The database is also used to track members and how much they have donated in the past.

Amanda manages information about those who plan to attend forums and conferences with a simple Excel spreadsheet, since the database in its current form is not well-suited for that.

SP also has a process for managing bills, which involves keeping track of expenses in an Excel sheet provided by SP's umbrella organization. Data is both sent back to the organization and saved electronically at SP.

Most information between staff members is shared through e-mail.

Currently, Amanda must manually compile e-mail addresses from the database if she wishes to send an e-mail out to a specific group of people. This can be a problem because it takes extra time to contact specific people (those who attend forums, policy makers, etc.).

# Problems/Opportunities

## 1. Work with SP staff to create a technology plan

### Description of problem:

SP currently lacks a technology plan that integrates vision, budgeting, and specifics of implementation. Because of this, technology is acquired on an as-needed basis, and is treated as a capital expense.

Though the SP work plan for 2006 contains specifics as to how the website and 3E Links support their mission, there has been no inventory or planning for software, hardware, or technology consulting.

### Impact:

The impact upon SP's mission statement is two-fold:

First, SP has no written policy for improving work processes with the help of technology. Unnecessary time might be spent working with sub-par software and hardware with insufficient training, and thus work processes settle into trends of doing things in a way that conforms with how things have always been done. Change is discouraged. Concretely, staff can sometimes spend too much time fiddling with spreadsheets and graphics programs and not enough time making others aware of sustainability.

Secondly, the lack of a technology plan implies that technology expenses are not provided for in a budget. Vital resources can then be drawn away from sustainability to fund unneeded technology. However, it is most often the case that needed technologies and training are not provided for, leading to the impact mentioned above.

### Description of work task:

The consultant will work with Amanda, Joan, Kim, and possibly an advisory board member to determine where Sustainable Pittsburgh is in its use of technology, where it should be, and the specifics of how to get there.

### Implementation of work task:

1. Gather at least 2-3 SP staff who wish to devote time to technology plan
2. Use *Technology Literacy Benchmarks for Non-Profit Organizations*, by NPower, to measure SP's use of technology
3. Based on above benchmarks and staff input, determine SP's specific needs
4. Determine SP's vision of technology and align with mission statement
5. Build technology plan as a working document, incorporating budgeting
6. Designate one *staff position* that will carry the responsibility of keeping the technology plan current.

**Expected outcomes:**

1. Staff members' awareness of technology will be raised
2. SP will now have an indicator as to how well technology has been implemented, when before there was no awareness of technology possibilities
3. SP will have the beginnings of a plan, and will be less prone to make decisions on an as-needed basis
4. Sustainable Pittsburgh will be sure to only implement technology that directly bolsters their ability to fulfill their mission statement
5. The budget will now include operating expenses for technology, when before there were none specified
6. Someone will be responsible for ensuring that technology plan remains current

**Impacts:**

SP will have very specific information on what technology should be implemented and how it will help to improve work processes and fulfill their mission statement. Budgeting will be more complete, and donors seeking to donate to Sustainable Pittsburgh will have a clearer understanding of what SP does with its funds.

Additionally, staff members will be empowered to make sound technology decisions by themselves. Instead of passively acquiring technology as needed, staff will have the ability to actively determine what should be done to improve capacity.

Maintaining a technology plan, however, will require additional time to be spent on technology. SP's work plan specifies that 3 hours should be spent per week on maintenance of the website, but this amount of time will have to be expanded. In addition to website maintenance, there will be the necessity for technology plan maintenance. This will involve an added duty to some position. The person in that position will be required to spend some determined amount of time on the technology plan, and will have to schedule discussions with other staff members.

**Feasibility:**

The creation of a technology plan seems feasible in that SP staff members are already expert planners, and a wide array of information already exists on the creation of a technology plan. Thus, the consultant can bring his knowledge of technology and technology planning resources to SP and work with them to plan out their technology needs. The people at SP understand the need for a technology plan and fully support the creation of one.

The consultant will work to ensure that the plan continues to be updated after his departure. Despite his and SP's best efforts, it is possible that there will be a lapse in technology planning as more pressing matters take priority.

Additionally, technology plan creation will be during SP's busiest time of the year, so it will be difficult to get additional input and commitment from Court and advisory board members. Court supports the plan's creation, but he will not be involved in the process until the final presentation of the technology plan.

## 2. Improve 3E Links Newsletter

### **Description of problem:**

One of SP's primary digital external communications is the weekly newsletter 3E Links.

3E Links is a service to raise awareness of sustainability issues in the news, as described above. However, it is suspected that 3E Links may suffer from some formatting and layout problems.

3E Links may not be reaching its target audience because of perceived length and disorganization (recall that there was only 1 reply to the Christmas edition of 3E Links, which asked the reader to reply with a short answer on how sustainability has improved his or her life). If this is the case, recipients might delete 3E Links newsletters as spam, or just let them build up in the inbox.

### **Impact:**

This directly impacts SP's ability to raise awareness of sustainability because potential subscribers to sustainability are turned away by the seemingly daunting length of 3E Links. In effect, Sustainable Pittsburgh is not reaching as many citizens or policy-makers as it should have the capacity to.

### **Description of work task:**

The 3E Links problem described above is largely speculation on the part of the consultant and staff members of SP, so some individuals will be gathered to discuss possible layouts and information to include in the body of the text. With knowledge gathered from the discussion, 3E Links formatting may be changed. It is also possible, of course, that it will not be necessary to change formatting, depending on what outside sources say.

### **Implementation of work task:**

1. Preliminary discussion of how 3E Links might be changed
2. Gather a group with at least some 3E Links recipients or expertise in news letters
3. Lead a discussion-based interview of 3E Links effectiveness
4. Determine improvements (if any) for 3E Links

### **Expected outcomes:**

1. SP members will be more aware of potential layouts
2. A greater understanding of how others view 3E Links will be gained
3. There will be real information of what, exactly, people do with 3E Links
4. SP will know if they should change 3E Links, and if so, then how

### **Impacts:**

SP will have greater knowledge of how people view 3E Links and the effect of layout and design upon what people actually do with the newsletter. Such knowledge will give them greater capacity to determine whether or not 3E Links needs to be changed to increase readability and ultimately increase awareness of sustainability.

Also, a new format for 3E Links may result in a newsletter that takes much less of Amanda's time to compile than it does with the current format.

However, it is very possible that a new format will actually increase the amount of time spent to compile the newsletter on a weekly basis. If SP chooses to implement a new format, staff must be very careful to choose one that does not increase time demands on Amanda.

Finally, the small sample size of the 3E Links discussion group may lead to narrowly-defined, unhelpful results. It may prove helpful to find someone skilled in design or in creating newsletters to discuss possible fixes for 3E Links.

**Feasibility:**

SP initially approached the consultant with the desire to explore how their presence on the web can be strengthened, and this project focuses on precisely that. The people at SP realize that 3E Links could possibly be improved, so they support this plan for improvement. Court's only reservations about change are that no one has complained about the current format, and he also does not want to change the purpose of 3E Links.

The bulk of this small-scale project will involve building a discussion group and determining potential changes to 3E Links. This is certainly within the skill sets of the consultant and the staff at SP. The most difficult part will be implementing a **successful** 3E Links redesign.

### **3. Improve web design capacity**

#### **Description of problem:**

SP's other form of digital external communications is their website, which is a service that provides information on Sustainable Pittsburgh's projects and how one can contact them, become a member/affiliate, or attend an SP-hosted event.

Despite the website's important service role, it is disorganized, contains broken links, and has outdated pages that have no reason for existing. For example, when first browsing the website, the consultant kept finding information about "topic teams" which seemed to be different groups of people whose role was to address different issues of sustainability. Website content leads to the impression that topic teams are an important and integral part of SP. However, upon meeting with Amanda, the consultant found that topic teams have no relevance to what SP currently does.

#### **Impact:**

This directly impacts SP's ability to raise awareness of sustainability because potential subscribers to sustainability are turned away by the non-professional appearance of the website. Important information and sustainability articles are buried amongst old news, so it may be difficult for visitors to find information that SP wants to showcase.

#### **Description of work task:**

SP has found a not-for-pay intern to build a website for their Transportation Funding Initiative (TFI). The consultant will not work directly with the improvement of the website, but will use this opportunity to determine particular specifications for the TFI. Ideally, the new TFI section will become a model for improving the layout of the rest of SP's website.

Additionally, the consultant will make recommendations for added staff responsibilities to ensure that the website is maintained as an excellent information service. These recommendations will be incorporated into the technology plan.

Essentially, this project exists to help SP plan out what they want to do with their website in the future, and also to increase Amanda's capacity to perform updates.

**Implementation of work task:**

1. Inform intern that TFI site may be a template for current site
2. Spend time with Amanda so that she can update completed TFI website
3. Incorporate plans for future renovations to main website into technology plan
4. Identify target areas in main website that can be immediately changed
5. Include in technology plan responsibilities for each staff member to send updates to Amanda about their specific section of the website

**Expected outcomes:**

1. The for-credit intern will carefully choose the layout of the TFI site by working closely with Amanda
2. Both the intern and consultant will ensure that Amanda can update the new TFI site
3. The consultant will help to develop a plan to carry TFI web design knowledge over to the main page
4. The main website will show immediate improvement in numbers of broken links and outdated pages.
5. Important pages will remain current and contain relevant information

**Impacts:**

SP will have a new website which not only directly serves their project needs, but also acts as a template for a redesign of the main website.

Further, there will be some quick fixes done with the main website that will improve readability and ensure that pages are current. Staff members will be held responsible for updating content of selected pages, but Amanda will be responsible for carrying out the updates that staff request.

However, this will again place an additional time burden on staff members. The requirement of weekly updates to a webpage will require a time commitment from each staff member, but Amanda, the bottleneck of the updating procedure, may have to commit much more time. For this reason, we should ensure that the updating process is standardized and easy to carry out.

Another problem with the website may arise if the not-for-pay intern does not live up to expectations. SP is essentially acquiring free, nonprofessional labor, so the intern's ability to deliver will remain questionable. The intern may not produce a good design for the website, and he may not do it in such a way that Amanda can update it.

Additionally, it is outside the scope of the consultant's work to carry formatting from the TFI website over to the main website. Such an occurrence will depend entirely on the successful implementation of a technology plan, or at least some form of planning that will allow SP to find resources to reformat the main website.

**Feasibility:**

Beyond working with Amanda to determine specifications for working with the TFI website intern, the feasibility of improving the website will only become impossible if the intern fails to provide what is required.

Staff members do not like the current look of their website, and they would definitely like to see an improvement in layout and relevancy of content. Court has specifically stated that the website can be improved, but that SP should first assess the cost-benefit of time spent on the website.

This small project only becomes impossible if Projects 1 or 2 take longer than expected. Because much of the work here is already being done by Vladimir, the TFI website intern, the consultant's involvement in this project will be pushed aside if necessary.