



Northwest Earth Institute Sustainability Education Programs— Introductory Packet for Cities and Municipalities

The Challenge

Currently, cities are tasked with addressing energy security, climate change and ecological sustainability challenges, while facing tighter budgets and ever-growing populations. Thus, many cities are looking for proven and cost-effective solutions to improve processes and implement effective sustainability initiatives in 2009.

A Part of the Solution

For cities looking to accelerate sustainability initiatives, the Northwest Earth Institute offers ready-made low cost sustainability education programs requiring minimal input, designed to promote employee and/or citizen buy-in through high quality and effective sustainability education programs. NWEI courses have been offered in several municipalities, including: Portland and Eugene, Oregon, Boise, Idaho, as well as Tacoma, Vancouver, and Issaquah, Washington.

Overview of the Northwest Earth Institute

The Northwest Earth Institute is recognized as a national leader in the development of innovative programs that encourage individuals and organizations to protect ecological systems.

Founded in Portland, Oregon in 1993, the Northwest Earth Institute has engaged more than 100,000 people in discussion courses. These self-guided discussion courses are offered in workplaces, universities, homes, faith centers, neighborhoods, and community centers throughout North America. Each program not only educates participants about sustainability issues, but also moves participants to take tangible actions to address ecological challenges.

The courses provide a supportive setting in which to examine personal values and habits, engage in stimulating conversation, create community, and consider ways to take action towards creating a more sustainable future.



NWEI currently offers seven discussion guides, any of which can be offered as part of sustainability education initiatives at the city level. The most relevant courses for city programming include:

- ***Menu for the Future*** – a six session discussion course exploring the connections between food and sustainability, considering ways to support and create emerging sustainable food system alternatives
- ***Global Warming: Changing CO₂urse*** – a four session discussion course looking at the challenges of climate change, and considering actions to curb the effects
- ***Choices for Sustainable Living*** – a seven session discussion course outlining connections between lifestyle choices and ecological stability, offering practical insights into making healthy and sustainable choices
- ***Voluntary Simplicity*** – a five session discussion course addressing the distractions of modern society that keep us from caring for ourselves, our relationships, and our environment

Benefits/Results Summary of Offering Northwest Earth Institute Programs

Over the last 16 years, NWEI has created a product and process that objectively delivers positive results. According to a 2008 survey, since participating in an NWEI course:

- 87% of surveyed participants feel a greater sense of personal obligation for solving environmental challenges;
- 94% more regularly make reductions in energy and water consumption;
- 92% buy more local and organic produce;
- 78% of NWEI participants take more seriously the challenges of biodiversity loss, climate change, rising personal consumption and limited natural resources
- 60% more frequently volunteer for environmental causes and make alternative transportation choices.



In 2003, Ciliberti & Associates, LLC, a research firm based in Portland, Oregon, conducted a study to assess the impacts of NWEI programs on participants. The research explored changes in awareness, values, attitudes, and perceptions as well as changes in actions.

Data was compiled from 10 focus groups, 271 survey respondents and 29 personal interviews with past course participants.

Key Conclusions

- Key Conclusion 1: The discussion courses bring increased awareness of the need to protect the earth. As a result, participants experience renewed hope, reinforcement of their values, and a new vision of the world.
- Key Conclusion 2: The discussion courses produce high levels of motivation and commitment that allow participants to make and maintain change.
- Key Conclusion 3: The increased awareness of the need to protect the earth, brought about by the discussion courses, engenders changes in both consumption patterns and broad lifestyle choices of participants.
- Key Conclusion 4: The discussion courses motivate participants to influence others by setting examples, engaging in dialogue and advocacy, and organizing groups. This influence tends to occur within existing social networks: the family, church or neighborhood groups, and the workplace.

"The course has strengthened my resolve to act constructively in the face of this daunting challenge, both individually and collectively with others of like mind. Taking such action further empowers me to forge ahead with renewed enthusiasm and optimism that together we do make a difference!"

-Participant in Caledonia, MI





Delivery of Programs

NWEI offers a self-guided series of educational discussion-style workshops not dependent on outside trainers. NWEI programs are designed to be participant-led, requiring minimal input from management or staff.

The only materials required for implementation are NWEI discussion guides for each participant. Each guide includes guidelines for facilitators and participants, a series of educational articles around session themes, questions for discussion, as well as ideas for action and further study.

Participants in NWEI programs generally meet for an hour weekly to follow the format outlined in each guide. Participants meet four to seven times, depending on the length of the course chosen.

Cost

There is no consulting or overhead fee for working with the Northwest Earth Institute. The only cost to your city or municipality is the price of discussion guides for participants. Discussion guides are \$20 each, plus shipping.

Next Steps

To learn more about coordinating a discussion course with your city or municipality, contact Kate Rinder, Outreach and Volunteer Program Coordinator at NWEI, at kate@nwei.org, or 503-227-2807.

The primary steps for organizing a course are selecting a topic, coordinating a location, day, and time, and connecting with the group participants. Once you have chosen which course topic to use, you can order discussion guides by calling 503-227-2807, or fax in the order form which can be found on our website.

NWEI can provide support materials such as promotional Course Flyers and our Course Organizer's Guide, with detailed suggestions for facilitation. These materials can also be found on our website at www.nwei.org/course_resources.



Roll out & Implementation Strategies

Cities can offer NWEI programs in a variety of ways. Examples of key delivery of program strategies include the following:

- **Green Teams/Sustainable Development Offices:** Should your city have a Green Team or a Sustainability Department, the discussion courses can be offered through these channels.
- **Pilot Program:** A core group of employees or management pilots the program, and leaders emerge from this group who will move environmental projects forward and organize further NWEI programs in their respective departments.
- **City-wide Sustainability Initiative:** Should your city decide to make participation in these programs part of a formal city sustainability strategy, you might begin with a pilot of the courses through certain departments, and then expand across departments. Often leaders emerge who will spearhead further courses. Consider choosing a target goal of the percentage of employees you'd like to run through the program.
- **Brown Bag Lunch Series:** NWEI programs have been initiated as part of informal lunchtime educational programming or a Brown Bag Lunch Series, with a staff person organizing meeting times, dates and locations and sending the invitations and tracking sign ups. Participants need to have the books beforehand and come to the sessions having read the session's materials in order to discuss. A series can be 4-8 sessions, depending on the chosen course. Participation can be voluntary or required. Courses can be corporate sponsored or employees can cover costs.
- **Organizational Development:** If your city is engaged in organizational change or organizational development work, courses can be offered as part of these objectives.
- **Community Offering:** Consider offering courses to community members, city partners or those in your supply chain.
- **Human Resources:** HR is also a possible avenue for offering the programs. Courses can be offered as part of an employee benefit package.



Testimonials from the City of Issaquah, Washington— NW Earth Institute sessions

Our sustainability discussion group included people from several departments who I didn't know well. It was a great opportunity to get to know them while discussing something as important as sustainability. To support our discussions we had a reader that was diverse, interesting, and comprehensive. We come away from the group with new contacts and knowledge that will support our work, our choices, and our lives every day!

—Lucy Sloman, AICP, Planner, Metro Department of Regional Transportation

The biggest thing that I took away from our sustainability class was specifics. Instead of thinking about climate change in a general, vague way I now have more concrete options and actions to consider, as well as ramifications to think about. I think I have a much broader perspective on the whole issue now and I should be able to make more intelligent decisions, based on what I learned in the sessions.

—Alan Haywood, City Arborist

Sustainable Living goes beyond putting your paper out to the recycle each week. This course helped me identify more aspects of the "footprint" we all leave as consumers and will affect future choices I make. It was fun participating w/ fellow city employees and hearing all the varied opinions!

—Trudy Pearson, Admin. Asst., PWE

After the first session on Sustainable Living, I couldn't wait to participate in the Voluntary Simplicity and Global Warming-Changing Course sessions. I like the discussion format that encouraged sharing our personal experiences. These sessions not only affect the choices I make for the better, but they also opened up discussions with friends and co-workers. This education spread awareness and action throughout the city and into our neighborhoods. I look forward to more NWEI courses.

—Carolyn Sygitowicz, Executive Assistant, Mayor's Office

The most important lesson learned from the Choices for Sustainability class was the opportunities we all have to do better to save our environment. I was impressed by all of the things that are already being done and very proud of all of the things our employees are doing to help our environment.

—Leon Kos, City Administrator