PlanetMuncie

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Faculty Advisor
Dr. David Hua

Student Members
Emily Dewig
Austin Fleming
Quintin Thompson

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Overview

The Muncie Action Plan and Ball State University are partners in the Building Better Neighborhoods Initiative that coordinates expertise and resources to support local neighborhood initiatives. PlanetMuncie is the outcome of an immersive learning project sponsored by the Building Better Neighborhoods Initiative. This project brought together a group of students and a faculty mentor with the goal of building a clearinghouse where residents could locate resources related to sustainability in Muncie and Delaware County.

PlanetMuncie seeks to help those who live, work, and play in Muncie and Delaware County discover all things sustainability-related in our community. These resources accumulated from the PlanetMuncie Community Survey on Qualtrics are organized around the philosophy that a sustainable community must take actions that support its social, environmental, and economic needs.

Originally, the intent was for PlanetMuncie to focus primarily on the environmental aspects of sustainability. The team strongly felt that the website should also address the societal aspects of sustainability as well. As suggested by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, individuals need to satisfy their physiological or safety needs before they are likely to be concerned with higher level issues such as the environment.

Our Mission

PlanetMuncie is a springboard to connect the Muncie and Delaware county communities to sustainability resources.

Our Vision

Through an investigation and categorization of organizations associated with sustainability, PlanetMuncie seeks an informed community where all citizens of Muncie and Delaware county can live and thrive for generations to come. PlanetMuncie strives to sustain the environmental, economic, and social needs of the community.

Our Belief

PlanetMuncie believes that sustainable communities must meet the environmental, social, and economic needs of their citizens.

Operational Definition

Sustainability creates lasting conditions under which humans and nature can exist in harmony; fulfilling the social, economic, and environmental needs of present and future generations in the Muncie community.

Data Collection

The immersive learning class developed and distributed a survey to the Muncie/Delaware County community. The survey was designed to ascertain the priorities of those who live, work, and play in the community. The survey also gave people the opportunity to share their knowledge of sustainability related resources in the community and provide suggestions on how sustainability could be improved.

The survey used a snowballing strategy to find respondents through social media and e-mail. There were about 250 respondents to the survey. Presented below is a summary of the findings.

How do community members prioritize different types of sustainability initiatives?

Survey respondents were presented with six subject areas related to sustainability and asked to prioritize each on a Likert-type scale ranging from 1 -10. Table 1 below shows the basic statistics of the responses.

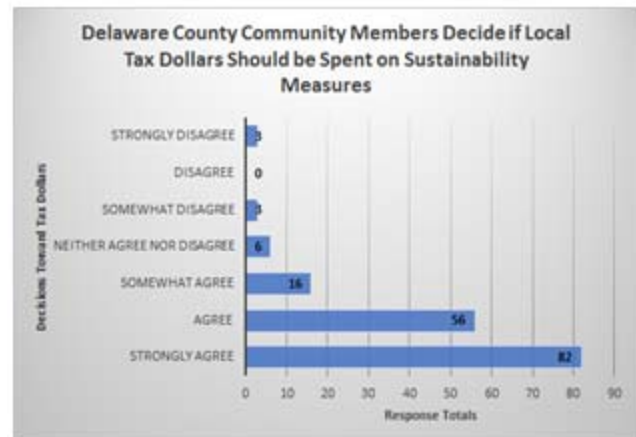| Field	Mean	Std Dev	Variance
Pollution Prevention (Air & Water Quality; Hazardous Material)	8.72	1.83	3.34
Natural Resource Conservation (Energy Efficiency & Water Use Reduction; Waste Minimization; Recycling & Use of Renewable Energy Resources)	8.76	1.64	2.68
Community Greening (Green Spaces; Urban Agriculture; Ecology & Biodiversity; Vacant Lot Revitalization)	8.3	1.86	3.47
Sustainable Transportation (Public Transit; Bikeways & Walkways)	8.29	2	4
Sustainability Education & Awareness (Community Ownership of Issues & Activities; Environmental Education in Schools; Youth Environmental Programs; Environmental Awareness Programs)	8.33	1.94	3.77
Green Economy (Green Jobs; Green Businesses; Green Construction; Sustainability Resources for Businesses, Governmental Agencies, and Non-Profit Organizations)	7.95	2.21	4.87

Table 1

The responses suggest that all of the subject areas were considered important by members of the community. With the highest average score and the smallest standard deviation, the highest priority was attributed to natural resource conservation. This was

followed closely by pollution prevention. The area ranked lowest was the green economy subject area. This area had both the lowest average score and the highest standard error of the six options. It is uncertain whether this is due to a lack of interest or a lack of understanding of the concept of green economy. Further investigation would be required to determine the cause for the low prioritization of green economy initiatives.

Do Delaware County community members believe tax dollars should be used toward sustainable resources?

Graph 1 identifies who in Delaware County encourages the use of tax dollars in environmental, economic, and social sustainability programs and resources. Community taxes used for sustainable resources, such as food banks, urban gardens, and green roofs would provide cleaner jobs and more social programs for people to collaborate. According to the survey responses, 83% of community members had a favorable opinion on using local tax dollars for sustainability measures, while 2% of community members reported a negative opinion. However, 15% of community members recorded no opinion.

Graph 1

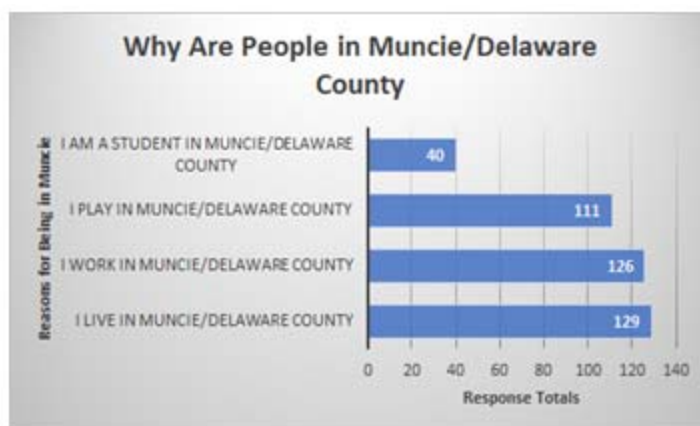## How do Delaware County community members want to receive information regarding sustainable resources?

Field	Mean	Std Deviation
E-mail	6.53	3.59
Text Message	3.32	3.57
Website	6.62	3.38
Facebook	6.1	3.99
Twitter	3.21	3.66
Instagram	2.85	3.57
Radio	5.21	3.62
Newspaper	5.09	3.75

Table 2

Table 2 indicates the types of media that Delaware County community members prefer to receive information regarding sustainable resources. According to this chart produced by our Qualtrics survey, the top three responses were: *email, website, and Facebook*. The least preferred methods of communication were Instagram, Twitter, and text messaging.

## How do the respondents connect to Muncie/Delaware County?

Graph 2 demonstrates the different demographics of people in the Muncie/Delaware County community. According to the Community Survey, it is evident that there are fewer students residing in Muncie/Delaware County at this time. Student numbers in the Muncie/Delaware County area are significantly lower during the summer because class is not in session. However, this graph reveals that survey takers permanently reside in Delaware County. These community members would relate more to and be more aware of the sustainable resources, projects, and programs that occur in Delaware County.

Graph 2

## Where Community Members Live in Delaware County?

Graph 3 communicates that most people who reside in Delaware County have a Muncie address except the 10% of survey takers who live in Yorktown, Selma, and Albany. For this project, it is important to know which communities have the strongest opinions and contributions to sustainable resource education and energy efficiency projects in their area.
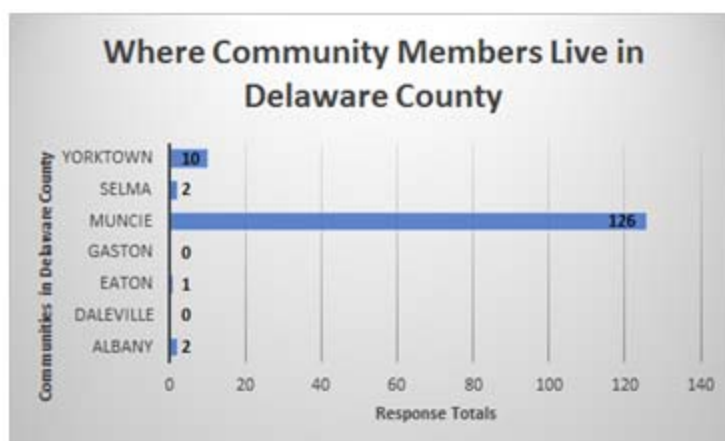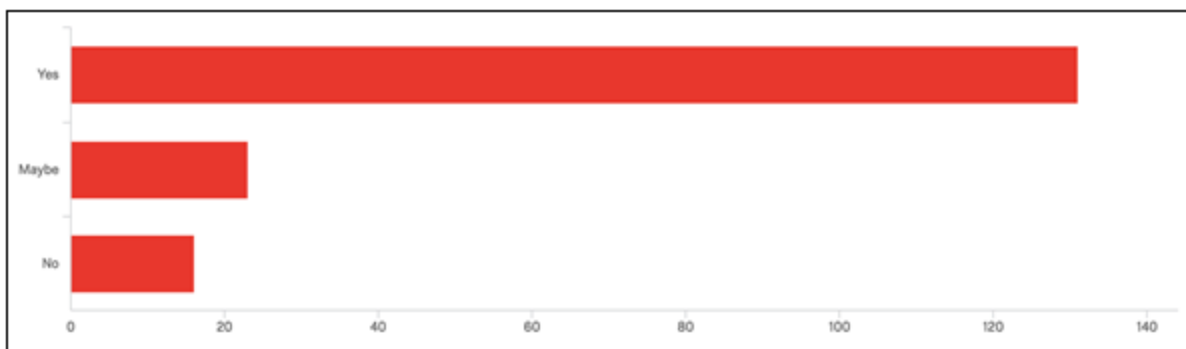

Graph 3

Ages of Delaware County Community Members

Graph 4 displays the ages of Delaware County community members who took the PlanetMuncie Community Survey. According to survey, 41% of community members are between the ages of 18-39. The younger generation tend to be more involved in sustainable programs around the community, such as Ball State University's Permaculture Initiative and Geothermal Project. Also, many programs, such as Camp Prairie Creek, in the Muncie/Delaware County area focus on educating children on natural resources. However, no one under the age of 18 took this survey, most likely because it was not administered to people younger than college students.
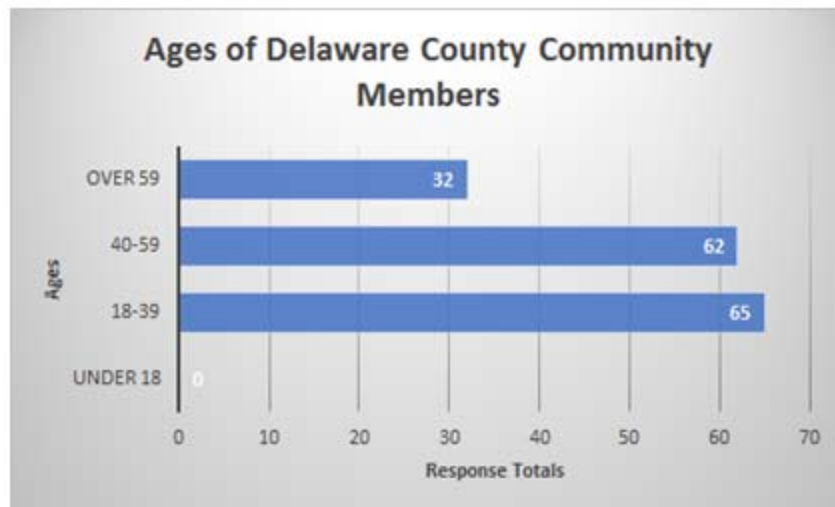
Graph 4

Are community members making renewable resources and/or environmental sustainability changes?

Graph 5

Graph 5 relays data regarding who has and has not made environmentally, economically, or socially sustainable changes to their lifestyles in the last five years. It is evident that many Delaware County community members have made sustainable changes to their way of life in the past five years, which may have occurred from an increase in environmental awareness and education in the community. However, thirty-eight community members responded "no" or "maybe" to having made changes to their lifestyles. It is possible that these people have made little changes, such as biking or

recycling more often, but may not have considered these significant changes for the survey.

If yes, please describe what changes you have made.

In order to determine what, if any steps community members had taken to practice sustainability, respondents were asked the following two questions: "Have you made any renewable resources and/or environmental sustainability changes in the last five years?" and "If yes, please describe what changes you have made." The answers to these questions demonstrate actions that individuals may take to make their own lives more sustainable, and include: upgrading to energy efficient appliances, composting, recycling, reducing use of electricity, eating less meat, walking or riding a bike instead of driving when possible, gardening, upgrading vehicles to a more fuel efficient model, performing energy-saving upgrades to one's home, reducing use of/recycling plastic bags, and making an effort to reduce water usage.

What are the sustainability-related projects or programs that community members are aware of in Muncie and Delaware county?/What are your recommendations for promoting sustainability in Muncie and Delaware county? Are there areas of sustainability that you think are not being addressed in your community?

While one question is about promotion and the other about areas not being addressed in the community, many people interpreted them as asking the same question. Therefore, we have essentially combined the two questions for interpretation. With that said, there is some bent toward promotion since some people did interpret the questions as specifically different. While qualitative, there were some key trends.

The top ten things that people talked about were:

        1 - Education/Awareness,

        2 - Recycling/Composting,

        3 - General Sustainable Development,

        4 - Water

        5 - Biking

        6 - Civic Engagement

        7 - Green Energy/Emissions

        8 - Central Sustainability/Community Sustainability Organization

        9 - Sustainable Motor Pool/Electric Cars

        10 - Community Cleanup/Clean Natural Areas

Website

The PlanetMuncie team developed the [PlanetMuncie](#) website through the Weebly website service. The website was designed to serve as a clearinghouse of all this sustainability related in Muncie/Delaware County. An individual visiting the site will be able to discover the resources and activities throughout the community that relate to sustainability.

The intent of the website was to present the existing resources and activities that are available in the community. The desire for this to be an evolving site that maintains relevance to the community necessitated a design that provided flexibility. This was accomplished through the use of tools that would allow for the simple

The choice of Weebly to host the website was based strictly on the fact that it was free. Another free alternative that could be explored is the Wix web hosting service.

Home Page

The home page provides an overview of the purpose of the PlanetMuncie website. The available resources on the site can be accessed through the navigation bar at the top of the page or buttons in the descriptive sections.
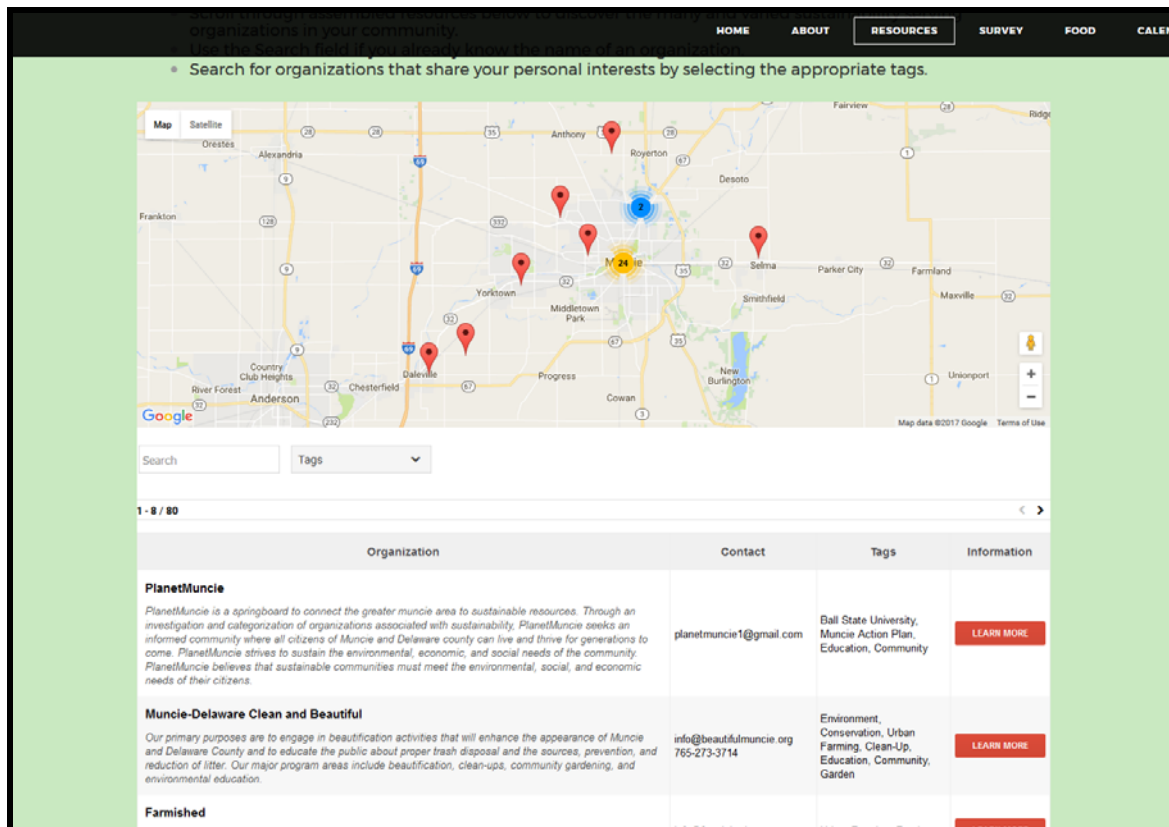
In addition to providing information about the sustainability related resources in the community, the home page also calls on visitors to become engaged by volunteering with organizations listed in the website.
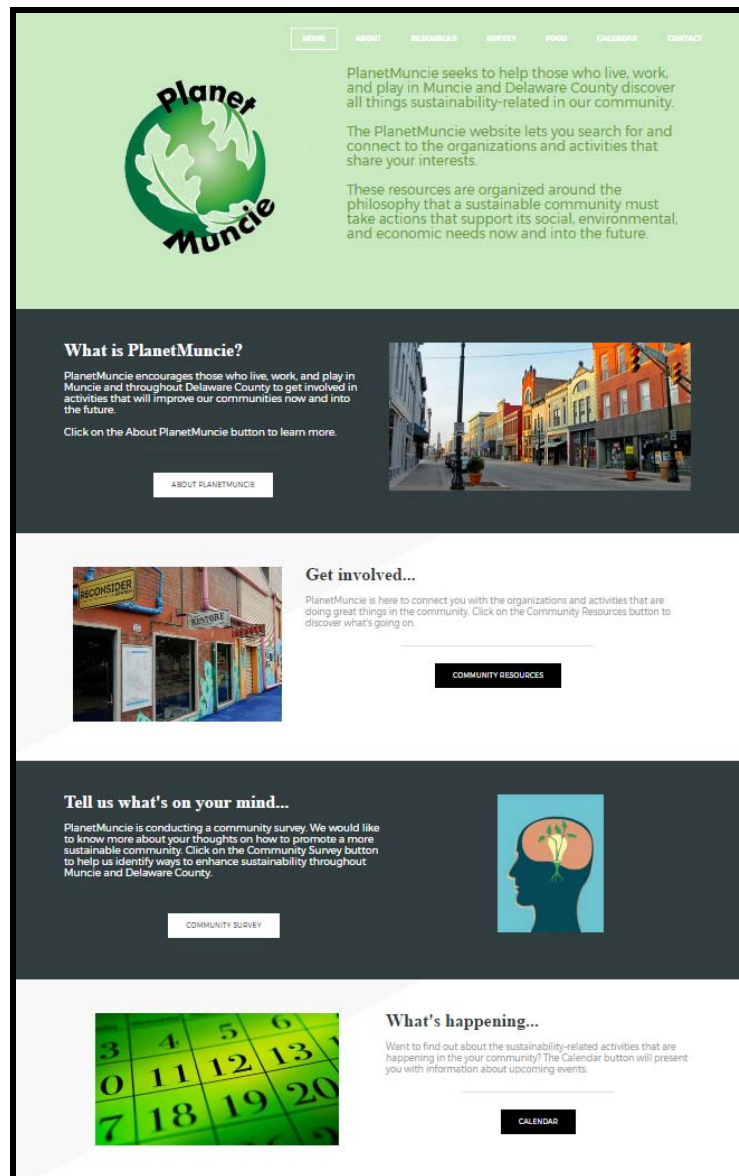
Databases

Resource Database

PlanetMuncie gathered data via survey, interviews, and individual research. This data established a comprehensive overview of the sustainable organizations operating in the Muncie/Delaware County area, which was then cataloged in a database on the PlanetMuncie website. This database, titled "Resources", provides a searchable index of all such organizations. Each organization is tagged descriptively, allowing individuals to filter organizations to find those that interest them most. Community Resources also displays each organization's contact information, mission statement, and location on a map, allowing individuals and organizations to contact sustainable organizations in order to volunteer, share, serve, and collaborate.

Food Database

A second resource on the PlanetMuncie website provides a searchable index of local food resources such as food pantries and community meal programs. These same food pantries have been cataloged elsewhere, most noticeably by Edible Muncie. However, they are also highlighted on this site as they play an important role in the sustainability of the Muncie/Delaware County area. That is, an individual must satisfy the basic needs of food and shelter before considering issues of sustainability.

Community Events Calendar

The final resource available on website is a community events calendar. The purpose of this page was to provide a centralized calendar of sustainability related activities occurring within Muncie and Delaware County. At this time, individuals and organizations within the community can submit information about their activities which would then be added to the calendar. In the future, the intent is for representatives from the community organizations to be able to add their events directly to the calendar. This could be accomplished and controlled by sharing the calendar with approved community partners. The PlanetMuncie team wanted to make sure that this resource was not a duplication of existing efforts in the community. In developing this part of the website, the MuncieCalendar.com website was reviewed. The MuncieCalendar site provides an excellent resource for discovering upcoming cultural and educational events. It did not appear to include any of the sustainability related activities that are occurring in the community.

Social Media

The immersive learning class has also created Facebook and Twitter accounts for PlanetMuncie. The class has not done anything with either of these accounts yet. Due to time limitations, the class devoted its attention to the survey and website. The accounts were created in anticipation of future development.

Moving Forward

The purpose of this immersive learning project was to lay a foundation upon which community members and organizations could continue to build a comprehensive and collaborative network of sustainability-related resources. What will follow are a series of recommendations on how we can move forward with building a more sustainable community.

Ongoing Student Involvement

A limitation of many immersive learning projects is that activity related to the project stops with the conclusion of the project at the end of an academic semester. The PlanetMuncie website will only be useful if it is maintained. There will be no reason for the community to stay involved with the PlanetMuncie website, Facebook, or Twitter accounts if there is no new information available.

To address this issue, the Partnership for Student Sustainable Advancement (PSSA) student organization will be approached. The proposal will be for the PSSA and its three supporting student organizations to find members who will support the PlanetMuncie accounts under the supervision of Dr. David Hua.

PlanetMuncie Community Collaboration Conference

One of the rationales for conducting this immersive learning course was to identify the organizations throughout our community that are engaged in sustainability-related initiatives. The Muncie Action Plan had expressed a desire to bring together these organizations with the intent to foster collaboration and support between them.

Another purpose for bringing these organizations together was to identify areas of sustainability that are not currently being addressed in the community. The Resource page on the PlanetMuncie website provides a quick listing of the various initiatives in which the community is already engaged. It also provides a map that marks the locations of these resources. This can be used as a tool to identify areas in the community that underserved with respect to sustainability. For example, the resource page originally identified three ways to participate in recycling for Muncie and none for the rest of

Delaware County. This discovery prompted us to dig deeper to determine if there are recycling opportunities in the other cities of Delaware County.

Participants in the conference can use this tool to identify the gaps in their areas of service to the community. It may be that additional resources are discovered and added to the resource page. The participating organizations may choose to collaborate to find a solution to a need that is not currently being addressed.

Community Outreach and Education

According to the PlanetMuncie Community Survey, survey takers who reported that tax dollars should not be used for sustainability efforts were of the 59 or older demographic. It is important now more than ever for sustainability programs and projects to reach out to older generations of people who grew up in a time when sustainability was the least of their concerns. Most sustainable resources in the Delaware County community focus on educating children and adults on natural resources and the importance of recycling and living a greener lifestyle. However, it is important for these resources to make the effort to promote their information in a way that older residents can appreciate.

How Do I Get Started?

The PlanetMuncie website should include a section to inform the community on how they can get started living a more sustainable life. At a minimum, this could include a list of actions that anyone in the community could easily do in order to have a positive impact on the sustainability of the Muncie/Delaware County area. It could also provide a list of online resources that would provide more detailed information on how to be sustainable across a variety of topic areas.

Green Economy

The survey suggested that the topic of a green economy may not be understood by the community or at least, not considered a high priority. Efforts should be made to educate residents, employers, and policymakers about the concept of green economy. Green economy should not be thought of simply as the fostering of businesses that foster sustainability related products or services. Instead, it is an ideology upon which sustained economic and community development. The United Nations implemented the [Green Economy](#) [Initiative](#) [(GEI](#)) in 2008 as a means to "eradicate poverty" at a global scale through sustainable initiatives. Perhaps a review of the GEI could lead to workshops for entrepreneurs and policymakers on how green economy strategies could be adopted.