



Early Adopters Program (variable length, typically 12+ months)

The Need:

Your community is interested in becoming a sustainable community, integrating environmental, social and economic priorities. A sustainable community cannot be achieved by any one organization alone. It requires unprecedented collaboration and cooperation. Communities are groups of citizens, local businesses and other interest groups, all of whom must be engaged in finding sustainable solutions together. That is why The Natural Step has created an Early Adopter Program.

Description:

The Natural Step's Early Adopters Program can help you set a common sustainability vision for your community and align all the actions and initiatives from municipalities, businesses and other stakeholders under a common framework.

Early Adopters are a group of leading stakeholders in the community -- local businesses, organizations, community groups, concerned citizens and municipal government -- who come together with a shared commitment to provide leadership by introducing and incorporating sustainability into their respective organizations and by working together towards community sustainability.

The interests of various stakeholders in a community are so diverse that a clear path forward to a sustainable community is often difficult to negotiate. The Natural Step provides a specialized leadership program for Early Adopters, which builds community capacity by establishing a common understanding and shared language for sustainability among a variety of community stakeholders, creating local success stories, and then supporting this core group of leaders to disseminate the lessons, knowledge and energy they have gained throughout the community and aligning them for strategic action.

The Early Adopters Program will facilitate the creation of the following:

- local role models and success stories that inspire the rest of the community about sustainability;
- a shared understanding of sustainability and alignment of vision, purpose and effort among leading organizations in the community; and



- peer to peer learning and collaboration amongst organizations on broader community-wide sustainability initiatives and strategies.

Process:

The Natural Step works with each community to co-design an Early Adopter program that meets the needs of participating organization. Each Early Adopter organization typically involves a series of workshops over a six to twelve month period. The programs generally include the following key elements:

Step 1: Setting the Stage and Recruiting Early Adopters

TNS will work with the community to co-design details of the Early Adopters Program, including customizing the education and capacity building phase to meet the needs of Early Adopters, and securing the necessary resources to carry out the program.

Up to 10 Early Adopter key community stakeholders will be identified and selected to participate. They should represent a broad cross section of the community. Each organization will be expected to sign a project charter assigning 3 - 5 participants (sustainability team) and committing time and resources to support their involvement in the Early Adopters program.

Step 2: Education and Capacity Building

This phase involves a series of training and planning workshops for selected managers and staff of the Early Adopter organizations to enhance their knowledge about sustainability and to build their skills for implementing the TNS Framework in their organizations. This phase also includes analyzing how the Natural Step Framework relates to and supports existing local programs and activities. These training and planning workshops typically take place over a six to twelve month period, with homework assignments in between. The individuals who participate also form the core community sustainability learning network responsible for the broader community engagement process.

Step 3: Implementation

Early Adopters will implement their sustainability action plans within their own organizations, supported by active coaching from TNS and their peers.

Step 4: Broadening Community Engagement

This stage involves getting the broader community committed to sustainability. It takes place after the Early Adopter training and is unique and specific to the communities involved. The Early Adopters are key to this



phase as they work together to develop a community engagement strategy. For example, this may include community sustainability forums and/or toolkits. The *Sustainability 101* eLearning course and other TNS resources will also be offered to citizens.

Step 5: Continuing Commitment and Action

The above process is designed to build capacity to have sustainability more effectively integrated into the daily operations of organizations beyond the timeframe of the project. The Early Adopter training is designed to encourage Early Adopters to continue to share knowledge and practice and to embed sustainability into ongoing operations. Community outreach activities may also continue beyond the timeframe of the project. TNS will also convene regular peer-to-peer networking meetings that provide a forum for community participants to learn from and share ideas with other communities and businesses on a similar sustainability journey.

Step 6: Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation will be integrated into the entire program from the beginning to ensure that each Early Adopter organization is able to monitor their progress toward sustainability and share the results.

Outcomes:

Each Early Adopter program is designed to build capacity and achieve results. At the end of the program, Early Adopters will have:

- Created a shared awareness and understanding of sustainability, what it means to their community and what it means to their own organization, and developed a clear understanding of a strategic framework that can align various organizations and move them strategically toward a sustainable future;
- Conducted a current reality evaluation, from a sustainability perspective, for each organization;
- Developed a clear and compelling vision of what each organization might look like in a sustainable society;
- Implemented a plan of action that advances sustainability within their organization through concrete actions
- Built capacity and competence within their organization to become better leaders in sustainable development
- Served as role models by sharing their own organization's successes and lessons with respect to sustainability



- Built community momentum towards sustainability by engaging citizens, and organizations within the community

Contact us for pricing and availability at info@naturalstep.ca.

