



# Designing and Deploying a Triple Bottom Line Community of Practice

## The Western New York Sustainable Business Roundtable

The Western New York Sustainable Business Roundtable (SBR) is a business driven organization supporting the growth and prosperity of the local business community through sustainable measures that increase efficiencies and reduce costs and waste.

The SBR sprang from a small group who understood the value of business sustainability along with the difficulty of implementing these programs alone. Propelled by the gap in support, encouragement and the recognition of the economic benefit to the individual business and overall community, the SBR experiment began to take shape.

After several months of meeting and planning with business and community leaders across the Buffalo Niagara region, the formal launch of the SBR took place on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014. Thirty businesses that had a similar interest in fostering learning, implementing best practices, and measuring sustainability in operations, as independent entities and as a region created the organization. This triple bottom line Community of Practice engages with resources and facilitates conversation to make impactful change.

The vision of the SBR is one of an environmentally and economically resilient community that prioritizes the well-being of current and future generations. The SBR’s mission is to foster collaborations that enable member businesses to act on their sustainability goals, maintain profitability and promote a healthy community. This vision and mission are executed through members who sign a pledge, create a sustainability plan, track metrics, and attend meetings and events.



Mark Shriver, Curbell Inc.

*“We are proud of the significant impact our work has made in protecting our environment and in reducing costs for our company. Being a strong environmental steward is not just a feel-good activity, but also one that can have dramatic impact on the bottom line.”*



Recognizing the benefits of leveraging resources, the SBR pursued participation in the federal E3: Economy, Energy and Environment program, facilitated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Region 2 ([www.epa.gov/e3](http://www.epa.gov/e3)). This voluntary initiative “supports manufacturing leadership through sustainability” by engaging federal, state and local technical assistance with the SBR’s member businesses. The initiative helps communities work in conjunction with their manufacturing base and other businesses to adapt and thrive in a new business era focused on sustainability.

### A New Business Era

Western New York is currently in the middle of an economic renaissance. Throughout much of the last 50 years, the once-vital rust belt city of Buffalo was in a cycle of disinvestment. The region experienced the closing of steel mills,



manufacturing facilities and shipping ports resulting in empty buildings, contaminated land and water, and a decreasing population. This is now changing in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the Buffalo-Niagara region is in a state of revitalization due in part to a focus on the “green economy” and the “blue economy” New businesses are forming, existing businesses are expanding, individuals, corporations, investors and financial institutions are returning and building. The Buffalo-Niagara community has rediscovered the lakes and rivers as places to live by, travel to, and have fun on the shores and in the water.

As an example, Buffalo’s green economy has experienced the establishment of SolarCity, a solar panel manufacturer owned by Tesla Motors in partnership with Panasonic. The manufacturing facility occupies a former steel mill and brownfield site and anticipates creating nearly 3,000 direct and indirect jobs. The region’s blue



economy is developing due to its location on two Great Lakes and the Niagara River. Water has always been the foundation of Buffalo’s economy. Today, as the environment becomes cleaner, it provides a competitive advantage and an attraction for businesses and investment to the region.

Manufacturers attracted to competitive land prices and abundant clean water for their processes are considering moving to Buffalo from areas ravaged by drought in recent years. These water bodies, including Niagara Falls and Buffalo’s inner and outer harbors support tourism, waterfront activities, residences and a host of both summer and winter sports.

While this renaissance is occurring and the “green” and “blue” economies are demonstrating successes, many businesses recognize the need to incorporate a triple bottom line approach into their operations and local community. The integration of economy, environment and community will drive a sustainable existence for profitable companies, their workers and natural resources for generations to come. It is for these reasons that the Western New York SBR was established. These companies and organizations collectively identify with this need and having to work together as a community of practice to achieve these desired results.

**Impactful Change**

The Western New York SBR’s membership is diverse and growing (76 member businesses as of March 2017), representing business from across the economic spectrum. These companies represent a broad spectrum, including: Manufacturing, Professional Services, Energy, Construction, Real Estate, Utilities, Government, Medical and Education. The value the SBR provides to



*Dave Sullivan, Industrial Solutions, Inc.*

*“The SBR has been great for us because it gives us the opportunity to look at similar and dissimilar companies to see what they do to recycle, reduce, reuse and how they cut their costs and environmental impacts through sustainable practices.”*

**Western New York SBR is a model Triple Bottom Line Community of Practice for collaboration among manufacturers, utilities, local government, and resources intended to:**

- Invest in the local community
- Address energy and sustainability challenges
- Provide valuable technical training and assessments
- Enable economic growth



members is the ability to leverage collective knowledge from these sectors while also offering practical advice, inspiration, and access to tools that can be implemented for economic gain and risk reduction. Together, the members provide the encouragement and leadership to create impactful change and contribute to a thriving, sustainable future for the Buffalo-Niagara region<sup>1</sup>.

The premise of membership and the SBR's fundamental practice is to strengthen businesses by creating and implementing a transparent, metric-based sustainability plan. This approach charts a course of waste reduction and increased recycling, water conservation, smart energy use, beneficial process changes and opportunities for new innovation. The co-benefits of implementing a sustainability plan are reduced costs and increased profits; improved compliance with regulations; enhanced brand recognition; recognition as a responsible corporate citizen and an employer of choice. The Roundtable offers networking with other business leaders; sharing of sustainability "best practices"; tools and templates; workshops; educational events and roundtable discussions; a Sustainable Business EXPO; and access to third party assistance resources and financial assistance.

On October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 exactly six months after its formal launch, US EPA Region 2 publicly announced the award of a grant to Empire State Development and Erie County to establish resources for the SBR. In the spring of 2015, the SBR signed a charter for the federal E3 initiative, led by the EPA. The E3 program offers technical assistance resources including customized hands-on assessments of production processes to reduce energy consumption, prevent pollution, increase safety and productivity. Federal resources made available to the SBR members include the Small Business Administration, Department of Commerce, Department of Labor, and Department of Energy, while state and local resources include the Industrial Assessment Center at Syracuse University, Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Investment Board, Inc., the regional Manufacturing Extension Partnership center: INSYTE Consulting, and the New York State Pollution Prevention Institute (NYSP2I) at Rochester Institute of Technology.

The SBR, as a community of practice, engages with these resources to gain technical assistance and achieve the goals of their sustainability plans. Measured results are possible when implementing recommendations from these resources as demonstrated by NYSP2I. This state-funded resource has assisted over 225 companies across New York state as of January 2017, resulting in the potential to reduce nearly 10 million pounds of waste and emissions, over 90 million gallons of water consumption, 62 gallons of wastewater discharge and almost 13 million kWh of electricity. Additionally, when funding is made available to support these efforts, as was experienced when NYSP2I received a grant from the EPA Region 2 for an E3 initiative in Tonawanda, NY, targeted results can be achieved. As a result of this grant, NYSP2I assisted four manufacturers with pollution prevention assessments and implementation. The measured potential impact reduction from this assistance for these four manufacturers totaled over 103,000 pounds of toxic/ hazardous materials, over 21,000 pounds of VOC emissions, over three million kWh of electricity and 3,000 MMBTU of natural gas.



*Patricia Donohue NYS Pollution  
Prevention Institute*

*"Regional business groups  
such as the WNYSBR  
create a collective impact  
for positive change in  
their communities with a  
focus on future  
generations."*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.wnysustainablebusiness.org/about-us/>



## **Sustained Results**

As the Western New York SBR strives to realize its vision of an environmentally and economically resilient community, its commitment to a triple bottom line Community of Practice will enable impactful and sustained change. The SBR's willingness to engage resources and facilitate conversation will ensure success for businesses to adapt and thrive in a new business era focused on sustainability. Through the SBR's E3 initiative and EPA Region 2's support, the Buffalo-Niagara region will reduce environmental impacts while maintaining and increasing competitive advantages; promote sustainable manufacturing and growth through innovative technology; improve the regional economy by retaining jobs in companies that are better positioned for global competition; and help foster a smarter, safer and more efficient green workforce<sup>2</sup>.

### **To learn more about Western New York Sustainability Roundtable Community of Practice contact:**

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### **Free or Low Cost Resources:**

- Energy, Economy and Environment: E3 – [www.epa.gov/e3](http://www.epa.gov/e3)
- General Safer Choice resources for manufacturers (especially product manufacturers) - <https://www.epa.gov/saferchoice/resources-safer-choice-product-manufacturers>
- Energy Star – [www.energystar.gov](http://www.energystar.gov)
- New York State Pollution Prevention Institute - [www.nysp2i.rit.edu](http://www.nysp2i.rit.edu)
- Industrial Assessment Centers - <https://energy.gov/eere/amo/locations-industrial-assessment-centers#sy>
- Manufacturing Extension Partnership (MEP) - <http://www.insyte-consulting.com/>

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<sup>2</sup> [http://www.wnysustainablebusiness.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WNYSBR\\_E3-Charter-Final-Draft-4-21-15.pdf](http://www.wnysustainablebusiness.org/cms/wp-content/uploads/2015/04/WNYSBR_E3-Charter-Final-Draft-4-21-15.pdf)