



A New Value Proposition for the
MultiState Working Group on Environmental Performance
MSWG Executive Committee – August 2010

Building on the commitments we have made to each other and to Administrator Jackson beginning in April 2009, this paper lays out our path forward. In Bob's April letter, we stated the following:

“The mission of MSWG has evolved over the past 14 years; however, we have always maintained a focus on strategies to enhance environmental performance. Over the years our members and participants (which number nearly 1000 and represent almost all of the states, many federal agencies, NGO's, the business community, and academia) through a process of dialogue, studies, and education have struggled the with challenge of how to advance the level of environmental protection and restoration significantly beyond what is achieved through current policy and practice.”

This language set the stage for our proposed new approach to contributing to the national dialogue on higher levels of environmental and sustainability performance:

“[W]e believe that performance-based programs have great potential if they have the correct focus and are based on sound principles. These programs should never provide an escape mechanism from clear regulatory requirements or oversight. They should always support leadership that demonstrates what is truly possible. On the behalf of MSWG, we offer to assist in manners you deem appropriate as the Agency considers the future of Performance, Leadership, and Sustainability programs. We offer a substantial body of knowledge and access to a large and well informed community across a diversity of sectors and are interested in contributing to the dialogue. We are also very committed to helping maintain one of the often less recognized benefits of PT, the network of government, non-government and business leaders who seek improved environmental outcomes and sustainability.”

We then set the frame for our approach in the February Los Angeles and April Austin workshops. The output from those workshops provided us with myriad new models of approaches to elevated levels of environmental and sustainability performance.

Weaving these threads together, we propose the following as a preliminary model for our work going forward:

- Enterprises of all kinds, but primarily small, medium, large, and multinational private companies; federal, state, and local governments and municipalities, across the country are struggling to define sustainability strategies.

- Many of these efforts are neither disciplined, carefully measured, or systematic
- We propose to be the incubator of best practices for the design, development, and implementation of sustainability strategic plans (SSPs) in the private and public sectors. In other words, our real interest is the relationships between these SSPs, the process of developing such strategies and plans, and the measurable achievement of meaningful outcomes.
- We will use as an organizing framework (modeled on the work that the Environmental Management System (EMS) concept did for MSWG in its early days) the notion that SSPs set the foundation for elevated levels of environmental and sustainability performance. Sustainability Strategic Plans encompass societal and economic as well as environmental concerns and opportunities.
- We mean to become the organization that for the private and public sector enterprises identified above (and including federal agencies operating under Executive Order 13423), will present, catalogue and analyze models of SSPs.
- We would also continue our work in discussing effective pathways to mainstream and institutionalize effective models of SSPs.
- We would define the criteria for what works, what constitutes success, and good plan effectively move from concept to action or implementation of SSPs
- We would also help to define the most effective means of reliably and transparently measuring progress against established goals for enhanced environmental and sustainability performance under SSPs. That is, what constitutes meaningful outcomes from these plans?
- We would also examine the fundamental question What is the role of a strategy which includes SSPs in achieving these outcomes, that is, are SSPs worth the time and energy invested in them, and if so, what characteristics or design attributes make them more likely to pay dividends? Who are the players involved and what do they do in developing such SSPs? What issues should be included and how should they be considered?
- In essence, we would continue to be the Convenors of the National Dialogue, but now the focus would be on new and more dynamic models that include but are not limited to environmental management systems and considers ecosystems based approaches to sustainability management.
- We would do so by continuing to engage the Leadership Community as we defined it in our letters to Administrator Jackson and in the two 2010 Workshops
- Our next few workshops would partner with the proponents of such SSPs (including their advisors) presenting their work for our consideration, evaluation, and analysis