

The APA Sustainable Communities Division Sustainability Champions Program

The APA Sustainable Communities Division (SCD) views sustainability as an important society-wide challenge, and sees a critical role for the planning profession in forging society's response. As a result, APA National and its Sustainable Communities Division¹ are advancing the profession's contribution. One SCD initiative involves their pilot Sustainability Champion's Program launched in the fall of 2014. It creates leadership, learning, and participation opportunities for its members to enhance sustainability planning in their State Chapters.

With sustainability being the defining challenge of the 21st century—*and sustainable communities being a defining subsystem challenge*--the SCD was founded on the perception of the growing need for leadership on comprehensive approaches to sustainability planning. The Division viewed this as especially true with the APA increasingly embracing the integration of sustainability thinking into planning practice at the same moment that many non-comprehensive approaches are spreading quickly.² The SCD's mission is to champion planning's unique leadership role in society's response. Effectiveness will demand new thinking about how communities are planned, designed, and managed.

To address these needs, the SCD proposes the broader notion of *sustainability as planning*, not simply as one more silo expertise. Instead, the SCD proposes sustainability as an integrative policy planning framework necessary for generating the innovative solutions for cross-cutting sustainability challenges, particularly those of the built and natural environment (subsystems of the larger societal system). Ultimately, it is hoped, this approach to sustainability as an integrative policy planning framework will accelerate the transition to sustainability and the associated enduring prosperity and well-being of sustainable communities in a sustainable global society.

The SCD's new Sustainability Champions pilot program is designed to support, promote, and further mobilize sustainability planning within APA State Chapters.³ The specific program for each champion and chapter will emerge from a dialogue and their particular interests.

One key theme of the program will be the shift to the emerging net positive and regenerative approach to sustainability planning. In addition, the program is intended to ultimately become a

¹ APA National Division SCD web page, <https://www.planning.org/divisions/sustainable/>, and the Division's blog site: (<https://apascd.wordpress.com/about-us/>).

² APA SCD in describing their approach <<find cite>>.

³ This program arose from the Division's first by-rite session at the 2013 APA National Conference, a facilitated discussion on Mobilizing Sustainability in APA State Chapters (summary: <http://norcalapa.org/sustainability-blog/connecting-apas-state-chapters-on-sustainability/>). The background article and research for the session starts on page four, here: <https://www.planning.org/divisions/sustainable/newsletter/2013/pdf/spr.pdf>.

national leadership resource and to influence the national sustainability discourse, in large part through the work and contributions of each chapter, champion, and APA members.

As a starting point, the Sustainability Champions program envisions the essential functions of state champions as follows:

1. Act as SCD liaison to the State Chapter.
2. Be a leading “voice” for sustainability within the Chapter.
3. Be a subject matter expert to planners nationwide.
4. Develop a goals- or issues-driven work plan for the first term (1-2 years).
5. Document existing sustainability ‘best practices’ in their region.
6. Develop a sustainability committee or mobilize activity otherwise.
7. Formulate a ‘sustainability track’ for the annual conference and extend it into a year-round program.
8. Network with allied professional groups to broaden support and action.