

Sustainability Inclusion in Marginalized Communities: The Sustainability Fair

Introduction: Our world faces serious threats from climate change. Every year the media reports on the devastation of more powerful storms, colder winters, and hotter summers. Governments and Corporations cannot act fast enough to mitigate the effects of climate change, and with the latest United Nations reports it feels as if time is another scarce resource. Sustainable practices need to become ingrained into daily life. The way we view sustainability needs to shift from an active process into a subconscious default setting. However, not all people are included in this endeavor; and if change is to happen all levels of society need to be a part of the movement.

The Project: The goal is to develop a sustainability fair that can be used to introduce sustainability principles in marginalized communities, these are communities that are rarely a part of the sustainability discussion. Opinions on sustainability in such communities can vary from already practicing sustainability to having no idea of what a carbon footprint is. A challenge is finding people within the community, at all knowledge levels, to participate so they can learn from each other. Communities are complex, they constantly change. There are many challenges and barriers that can vary by community. The sustainability fair needs to be general in what it teaches about sustainable living, but also needs to be applicable to the community it is being applied in. The goal is to be able to take it to more communities and be able to teach people at a grassroots level to bring about change. The secondary goal is to leave people at every community that would be able and willing to continue to use the sustainability fair method to teach others or to participate in more sustainability fairs. Exposure to sustainability is the first step, then the learning and application can begin.

Methods and Tools

- Use social media for outreach to potential partners as well as community members
- Network with members of the community in person to establish rapport

- Build partnerships to help operate and fund the fair
- Use Census data to understand demographics and economic background
- Consult with members of the community to understand cultural values

The tools and methods used are not new or unique to this project. They are similar to the tools used in any campaigning effort. They were used constantly throughout the project to maintain interest and build the project up and reach milestones.

Summary, Results, and the Future: The milestones of the Sustainability Fair are to generate enough interest to have 20 attend the fair, be able to follow up on if their lifestyle has changed and have enough interest to set up the next sustainability fair. The next fair can be in the same community or in another one. The project is validated by planning a follow up fair or spreading to another community or neighborhood. One of the most positive things to come from these efforts is the creation of interest. When you see somebody, who has never thought of sustainability as a way of life before being engaged and wanting to hear more, learn more, or try something new is what the project is all about. This interest represents value. It shows that these communities should not be excluded on our campaign to mitigate the effects of climate change. As people become interested and learn more they will implement changes. They will weigh the impact of their decisions and they will plant the seeds of real, long lasting change. The future of the project will require it to be larger. It needs to remain a community effort but needs more input from local businesses and groups to be more impactful. This will require more community research and more time invested in networking to be successful. As social, environmental, and economic needs are addressed the Sustainability Fair will be a way to teach people that sustainability is for everyone.