

Sustainable CT Fellowship Report

For WestCOG Summer 2018



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WestCOG Offices

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Sustainable CT Fellowship Report

WestCOG Region – Summer of 2018

Program Description

Independently funded and originating from the Institute for Sustainable Energy at Eastern Connecticut State University, Sustainable CT is a voluntary certification program that awards communities for their sustainable and resilient efforts. All towns and cities within Connecticut, regardless of population or resource capacity, have the opportunity to earn certification points within the program by aligning the Sustainable CT Actions with an event, regulation, ordinance, or program in their community. Furthermore, the program serves as a communication tool for municipalities to bridge the gap between municipal departments, organizations, and events that are within the town.

The program provides a list of best practices (actions) for municipalities to choose from along with potential funding. There are nine categories, making up 55 actions, totaling 1,645 certification points as depicted in Table 1. To receive certification, towns must complete at least one action in each of the nine overarching categories, provide supporting documentation, and receive at least 200 points for Bronze Certification (400 points for Silver).

Table 1. Sustainable CT Actions and Points		
ID	Category	Points
1	Thriving local economies	170
2	Well-stewarded land and natural resources	250
3	Vibrant and creative cultural ecosystems	75
4	Dynamic and resilient planning	250
5	Clean and diverse transportation systems and choices	235
6	Efficient physical infrastructure and operations	220
7	Strategic and inclusive public services	295
8	Healthy housing options	100
9	Inclusive and equitable community impacts	50
10	Innovative Action	20
Total		1665

Program Origins

Municipal leaders, residents, business owners, and non-profits representing Connecticut's 169 towns and cities partnered in 2016 to begin developing the Sustainable CT Program. The idea and structure for this program was inspired by established sustainability programs such as Sustainable New Jersey and Climate Smart Communities in New York. After the vision of the program was established and the groundwork was set in place, municipal officials collaborated with numerous subject-matter experts to create a Master Action List. The program could not have been developed without the generous support of the Emily Hall Tremain Foundation, Hampshire Foundation, and the Common Sense Fund.

Fellowship Program

To facilitate program adoption, the Institute for Sustainable Energy contracted 13 interns (Fellows) from universities all over the state to be deployed to the nine COGs (Council of Governments) in Connecticut with each fellow having a major related to environmental science or sustainability.

The foremost objective of the Sustainable CT Fellowship is for the interns to work with municipal leaders and staff to get registered towns within their assigned COG certified. The secondary objective for the fellows is to recruit more towns from their assigned COG into the Sustainable CT program. Two Fellows were assigned to WestCOG to aid nine registered communities. The duration of the fellowship limited to cumulative 400 hours.

Methodology:

During the Sustainable CT Fellowship, a systematic strategy was applied to target active communities and bring them into the first tier of the program, the “Bronze” status. The applied methodology is outlined below.

Fellow Training

Sustainable CT hosted a training session in May to ensure the Fellows would be well-acquainted with the Master Action List and the Sustainable CT website before being sent out to assist towns with their applications. During the training session the Fellows were acquainted with the nine COGs of Connecticut, a variety of state agencies, and techniques to quickly become familiar with the Sustainable CT Actions. The Fellows were also introduced to the Sustainable CT technical staff, the same staff they would collaborate with on behalf of the communities during their fellowship.

Sustainable CT Fellows at WestCOG also received additional training from WestCOG staff during their first week. Topics included COG functions, funding structure, outreach techniques, report writing and professional development skills.

Initial Outreach

The first few days at WestCOG were spent studying the actions in depth and sending initial outreach emails to all the registered towns. The outreach began with an email to the contacts that were provided by Sustainable CT to introduce the Sustainable CT Fellows, which would be providing technical support on the towns behalf. For many towns the point of contact was the First Selectmen or Town Administrator. Many of these points of contact were adjusted as to appoint a municipal employee or volunteer to lead the application process. Once a point of contact was

established, initial kick off meetings were then set up for each community.

Municipal Action Inventory

In preparation for the Municipal Kick Off Meetings, a custom Municipal Action Inventory was created for each town which outlined potential points, and recommended actions. Actions were identified as either *Existing*, *Easy to Access*, or *A Good Fit* and were selected to add up to 200 points, the minimum for Bronze status. The potential points for most towns ranged between 250-400 points.

The document was used to guide discussions and served as a road map for municipalities to earn Bronze Status. The inventory highlighted key areas for municipalities to zero in on to reach the minimum requirements under the 9 categories. During meetings the inventory could be populated with corresponding activities and their respective source (e.g. POCDs, ordinances, regulations, municipal webpages, and social media pages). If possible, a hyperlink was provided which led directly to the documentation needed to receive credit for the action.

Kick Off Meetings

Once the contact from a registered town responded to the initial outreach email, a meeting was coordinated with the primary contact and a Municipal Action Inventory was created for that town.

When the municipal staff members agreed that a town activity researched qualified for points under an action, permission was requested to obtain the final submission requirements for uploading. The process of uploading the files provided the application directors additional time to preform research and other tasks. Uploading was one of the services the Fellows provided, for the application directors were given the flexibility to utilize the Fellows as they

saw fit. The uploading of documents by the Fellows ensured consistency in how files were named and numbered, making for a smoother identification of documents when it comes time for the Sustainable CT technical staff to begin reviewing the town applications.

Early Application

Municipalities had the option to submit an early application on May 1st, 2018. The towns that were registered early were capable of submitting for this early deadline. The early application provided the towns with feedback on their submissions to help them receive points they were close to obtaining and identify the actions that were approved for points with proper submission. Towns that submitted for the early application deadline required a different meeting format compared to those that were new to the program. These select towns were familiar with the actions and had already uploaded files on their own; therefore, it was not a necessity to thoroughly review the Municipal Action Inventory with these towns.

Provided that the town's early application submission contained a minimum of 200 or more requested points, the Municipal Action Inventory would be focused around the corrections needed in the application to obtain these points. Feedback provided by the Sustainable CT technical staff would be reviewed while outlining exactly why actions were approved or denied, and what needed to be done to complete those that were denied. The towns that submitted for the early application provided a plethora of comments and suggestions that were all documented. The provided information from the towns was conveyed to the Sustainable CT technical staff for consideration. With the feedback from many towns, Sustainable CT was able to apply changes to the language and submissions of actions to accommodate for the varying towns

within Connecticut. A line of communication via email and phone was upheld to allow for quick and continuous streams of information and documents. All tasks and questions were documented, completed, and relayed back to the Sustainable CT application directors of each town promptly. Minor corrections needed for points were done by Fellows, such as converting web links to PDF files, assisting staff members in researching, and locating the final documentation required to receive credit for actions.

After introductory meetings were conducted with all registered towns, the subsequent two weeks were focused on uploading all the files the Fellows received from application directors or located themselves. Simultaneously, all questions that were asked via email or phone were answered promptly using the knowledge of the Fellows, or by referring to the Sustainable CT technical staff for concise and direct answers.

Municipal Follow Up Meetings

Once the stream of questions received had reduced in volume, an email requesting a follow up meeting was sent to the registered towns. The objective of these meetings was to discuss the status of each town in the application process and to look for actions that could be completed for additional points. These meetings also involved an evaluation to give an accurate estimate of the amount of points a town has acquired thus far. In addition, it enabled application directors to express any concerns or issues they encountered with the program thus far.

The Fellows highly recommended that towns take advantage of the introductory and follow-up meetings. After these meetings, it was up to the application directors to reach out to the Fellows with remaining questions and request

meetings. After completing both rounds of meetings, most of the Fellows' time was spent uploading documents into town applications, working on specific projects towns requested assistance with, and reviewing applications for any needed changes. Other than that, the remaining time was spent going to meetings that application directors requested to clarify any confusion or answer specific questions they prepared. The application directors utilized these meetings as opportunities to ask questions and voice concerns they wanted the Fellows to pass on to the Sustainable CT technical staff. Compared to the introductory and follow-up meetings, these gatherings focused on distinct action items and documents, and typically just required the clarification of action requirements by the Fellows and Sustainable CT technical staff.

Internship Closing Strategy

As the final weeks of the fellowship approached, calculations were made to predict when a fellow would hit the 400-hour limit. Sustainable CT staff was made aware of the final day along with the application directors of the towns that were worked with all summer as well. A template email was created that informed the municipalities of the final day of the Fellowship. The email requested they send any final documents or projects our way at least two weeks before the departure date calculated and thanked them for their dedication and hard work in the inaugural year of the Sustainable CT program. This closeout guide provided contact information of those that are able to provide the towns assistance once the fellows were no longer working with them and reinforced the Fellows' encouragement for towns to reach certification.

Additionally, In the final weeks of the fellowship, WestCOG coordinated with Sustainable CT to host a Q&A session to answer the questions of

the Sustainable CT coordinators, and to review the action submissions for the application at that time.

Municipal Case Studies

Each of the nine towns registered into the program at different times, had different communities, and varying approaches towards completing the Sustainable CT application. The program was created to accept the differences of all municipalities within the state. The goal for the Fellows was to be flexible, for each municipality operates differently. These experiences are outlined below for each municipality.



Leo and Collin, Interns at WestCOG

Bethel

The town of Bethel was the 50th town to register into the Sustainable CT program. At the same time, Bethel became the 9th town out of 18 in the Western Connecticut region to register into the program. Due to their registration coming in late June, Bethel strategized to prepare for the next year's certification cycle. The Sustainable CT Fellows created an outline of activities and next steps for Bethel and for future Sustainable CT Fellows to use as a guide for certification in years to come.



<https://patch.com/connecticut/bethel/calendar/event/20160813/4740/ingersoll-autos-free-movie-night-at-edmond-town-hall>

Brookfield

The municipal point of contact for the Sustainable CT Program was the town planner who provided initial documentation outlining the communities farmers markets and “buy local” campaigns. Brookfield’s Municipal Action Inventory provided a strategy for Bronze certification with a potential of 275 points. Despite a strong start, Brookfield was not able to reach the requirements for Bronze status due to limitations on dedicated municipal staff time and a lack of volunteer participation. Brookfield is well poised for Bronze status for the next year and could benefit greatly by identifying a volunteer to support the effort.



<https://www.newstimes.com/local/article/Brookfield-sewer-department-hopes-to-buy-office-11956095.php>

Greenwich

The Town of Greenwich was an early adopter into the Sustainable CT Program. Greenwich utilized municipal staff and members from the Conservation Commission to form a diverse team. Greenwich did much of its own work; researching and uploading documentation allowing the town to leverage the Sustainable

CT Fellows on technical issues. Greenwich provided extensive feedback which led to several amendments within the Sustainable CT program.

The team from Greenwich contacted the Sustainable CT technical staff members to advocate for their bag ban to be considered and were successful in the end. The staff from Sustainable CT respected their dedication to the initiative and acknowledged their hard work, informing them that bag ban will now earn them credit for the Innovation Action. Greenwich has approximately 165 points competed in their application and is on their way to Bronze certification.



<https://www.techandcivillife.org/spotlights/2017/5/16/greenwich>

New Milford

The Town of New Milford dedicated a town planner to lead the application process. During the meeting, the planner gave the Fellows access to upload all readily available documents. The Fellows were able to attain a wide variety of documents through online searches and were able to upload for actions worth approximately 80 points.

During the follow up meeting, the planner informed the Fellows that a volunteer was going to be managing the application. The planner and volunteer were able to build from the foundation laid by the Fellow’s submissions. New Milford has accumulated 185 points in just

over a month, making Bronze certification an attainable goal.



https://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/07/14/stars-hollow-gilmore-girls-towns_n_5570924.html

Newtown

Newtown utilized a different approach compared to most other towns while working on the application. Newtown appointed a volunteer as the application director who collaborated with existing municipal departments throughout the application process. Each member from a municipal department was given the responsibility of gathering the documents obtainable for actions that relate to their department. For example, a member of the Economic Development department oversaw fulfilling the category called Thriving Local Communities which pertained to her area of expertise. The Municipal Action Inventory served as a guide for the volunteer and municipal staff to complete the application. The Fellows were tasked with uploading all documents that were readily available for submission to establish a foundation for all parties to build from.

As the volunteer dedicated a portion of each day to the application, the Fellows were in continuous communication with the volunteer regarding documentation for uploading. The volunteer was engaged in the program, having the opportunity to meet with the Fellows on five occasions. The meetings and constant communication frequently updated the Fellows on Newtown's application status and current areas of focus. While the system Newtown used

had the potential to cause miscommunications and overlap of work, it worked effectively for the town. Newtown currently has 110 points with many actions in the final stages of being completed.



<http://www.ogind.com/portfolio/newtown-town-hall>

Ridgefield

Ridgefield had a team consisting of volunteers with one, a Conservation Commission board member, served as the lead for the application process. Ridgefield requested aid to create a Tourism and Cultural Asset map promoting vibrant and creative cultural ecosystems in their municipality. The Fellows worked with the application directors and the Ridgefield Arts Council Chairman to make significant process. The project will be completed prior to the application deadline for a value of 10 points.

Aside from the interactive map and inventory, the Fellows' interaction with Ridgefield's applications directors focused on several tasks. The tasks requested involved tracking down C-PACE resolutions, Housing Appeals Lists, confirming if certain documentation would qualify to earn the town credits, and uploading files the team sent to the Fellows. The two individuals assigned to this project in Ridgefield worked efficiently by using the Municipal Action Inventory as a guide and gathering documents promptly. Ridgefield has 280 points, enough for Bronze certification, and is well on their way to achieve Silver in either this certification cycle or the next.



<https://news.hamlethub.com/ridgefield/politics/43847-tax-information-from-the-town-of-ridgefield>

Stamford

The Town of Stamford was one of the few towns in the WestCOG region that submitted for the May 1st application. The staff that worked on the early application submission were able to gather a large quantity of documents and request 680 points in the early application. Following the early application, Stamford was approved 85 points by the Sustainable CT technical staff.

Stamford was able to dedicate the time and resources to complete the application for the August 24th deadline. The aid of the Fellows was acknowledged, but not required. The city only needed to acquire an additional 115 points to qualify for a Bronze certification. Given the number of documents uploaded in the early application, Stamford has the capability of acquiring Silver certification.



<http://www.city-data.com/picfiles/cpic58795.php>

Weston

The Town of Weston committed a member of the town's Sustainability Committee to lead the Sustainable CT application process. During the meeting with the application director, it was made evident that Lachat Farm is the center of sustainability for the town of Weston. The Farm also served as a community center that provided Weston with a selection of actions that could be applied to the farm and completed. After the kick-off meeting, the Fellows were able to obtain documents and submit several actions worth a total of 50 points. Weston had a strong start in the application, but due to a restriction in staff time and resources, it does not appear that Weston will meet the requirements to certify by August 24th. The town has the Municipal Action Inventory that was created by the Fellows will serve as a guide for the next upcoming certification cycles.



<http://www.westonmo.us/>

Westport:

The Town of Westport committed to the Sustainable CT program early on. Westport employed a diverse team of municipal staff that focused on sustainability. The team was able to apply for the early application, with a requested total of 435 points. Westport researched and submitted documents on their own, thus utilizing the Fellows to answer questions about actions. The Fellows took note of all questions, comments, and concerns provided by the

Westport team that would allow for improvements in the functionality of the program.

The team conveyed feedback for the Sustainable CT technical staff to consider that pertained to the actions many of the nine categories. The responses to the technical staff by the Westport team helped lead to changes in the Sustainable CT program to benefit all towns and cities in the state.

Using the Sustainable CT feedback from the early application, the Fellows focused on identifying the actions that were attainable for the town of Westport. The Fellows were able to identify actions with a value around 380 points that can be corrected and obtained for the application deadline. The team has homed in on these actions to certify for Bronze certification, with a potential of hitting the 400-point mark for Silver certification.



<http://www.yourfairfieldcountyhomes.com/Westport-CT-Real-Estate>

Lessons learned

- Each municipality is different.
- Face time with community members is important for building relationships. By being flexible, accommodating, and punctual communicated a commitment to serve communities.
- The Municipal Action Inventory served as a baseline for communication between the application directors of each town and the Fellows. It is highly recommended to have the inventory incorporated in future efforts.
- During the meetings it was critical for the Fellows to document all feedback provided by the towns as a strategy was discussed, questions were asked, and suggestions were provided.
- The capacity of a single fellow is estimated to be able to serve four communities starting from scratch and getting into the bronze category.