**Proposal: New Economy Media Initiative**

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Increasingly scarce resources, global warming, and a US economy in need of new thinking about energy production, employment, and manufacturing all point to sustainable business as a key to future US growth and development. Attempts to understand the failures of the current economy and to look toward a future economy will be incomplete if sustainable business is not taken into account.

*Yet, neither sustainable business nor the media has done a good job of telling the sustainable business story to the American people.*

Unlike legacy businesses that have had decades to develop communication and branding departments, most sustainable businesses are young. Their leaders have focused on developing and selling their products, not on communicating their business vision. These business leaders need media training in order to become more effective communicators on their behalf.

On the media side, business issues get covered regularly in mainstream press, but the businesses covered are primarily large multinational corporations, not sustainable businesses. The independent media, which has a particular interest in sustainability, rarely covers business. When they do, independent media has focused strongly on the impacts and abuses of the old economic paradigm and practices of large legacy corporations, but has large ignored the benefits and practices of businesses that are driving a more sustainable economy.

*There is significant opportunity to change the story that is being told about business and the economy.*

The goal of this initiative is to tap the growing presence of new economy businesses as new media voices and to increase the capacity of independent media to cover sustainable business issues, in order to provide the American people with the reporting they need about businesses, economic practices and policies guided by sustainability.

Why Sustainable Business Needs to Tell its Story

Sustainable businesses encompass a wide range of business types including local, microenterprise, social enterprise and socially responsible businesses.

Sustainable businesses do best in a society in which unlimited corporate donations cannot buy elections, economic development and tax policies reduce income gaps, businesses and the government make investments in clean technologies, products are manufactured in America, local economies are bolstered, health care is affordable, climate change is appropriately addressed, and our education system enables America to retain its competitiveness. In short, sustainable business requires a just and sustainable economy.

The key to achieving a just and sustainable economy is to mobilize the voices of a diverse set and large number of business leaders to become powerful messengers for change. Right now, those messages are not being carried by sustainable business, but by conservative business groups that continue to embrace the old, broken economic model of unbridled market forces, lower taxes, unlimited and hidden corporate campaign contributions and onerous burden of regulations. To date, these business interests have been treated as the monolithic representative of businesses on Capital Hill, in state houses, and in the media.

That neeeds to change. Businesses have enormous credibility with the American public as a trusted, authentic voice of business. Sustainable businesses need to counter traditional large corporate dominance with alternative business voices. This is part is why the American Sustainable Business Council was created.

Media Training for Sustainable Businesses

Socially-minded businesses face a formidable battle when it comes to sharing their perspectives. Bias against sustainable business by the media is part of the problem; another part is the inconsistent and often inadequate communications skills of even some of the most valuable non-profits and business leaders.

Marginalization is self-perpetuating. After years of failing to penetrate the dominant media, many socially-minded businesses downsize, or never invest in communications staff or professional media training. As a result leaders of such groups fail to develop good habits or skills, and perform less well than they might when they do get a chance to speak on radio or TV. In addition, the media work of such groups is often ineffective because they have little knowledge of how media decisions are made, their business leaders have little on-air experience, and personally and professionally they have very few relationships with decision makers in the media.

One key goal of this project is to strengthen the messaging and performance through specialized, hands-on media training with a focus on broadcast media - TV and radio --led by Grit TV. This training is informed directly by professional experience and the expressed needs of the groups concerned. The training gives business leaders an in-depth look at what it takes to represent themselves and their work in the modern media.

Topics addressed include how to work with producers and bookers and ensure that they call you back, makeup and clothing, as well as the fine-tuning of your message, radio skills and camera technique. Participants practice their interview skills in role-play in a studio setting with a professional interviewer, under lights. Participants see playback of these interviews and hear critique of their work. They can also choose to participate in a workshop on "shameless self-promotion" for leveraging every appearance to maximum effect.  These trainings are day-long or day and a half.

Why Independent Media is Part of the Solution

The natural home for in-depth coverage of sustainable business is independent media. Defined by the fact that they are not owned by multinational corporations (75% of Media Consortium outlets are actually non-profit), independent media outlets share many of the values of sustainable business.

Like sustainable businesses, independent media outlets value environmental sustainability, worker’s rights, and locally-based decision-making. Like sustainable businesses, independent media outlets answer to stakeholders, not shareholders. Both are mission-driven to equally value the needs of people and planet.

Too often, however, independent media don’t see the parallels between their own values and sustainable business. Instead, independent media often defines “business” as “multinational corporate business” and tends to adopt an aggressive interrogatory stance towards the corporate world, which it condemns for valuing profit over people. As a consequence, the sustainable business world is lacking its best ally—and its best watchdog.

One key role of the media is to keep the people and companies it covers honest. The people of the United States need independent media to ask the tough questions for which they are known:

* What are the different economic models, frames and practices, not only understanding the present economic paradigm and practices but the opportunities through new and sustainable economic thinking?
* Can sustainable business replace the current profit-only business model?
* Would our nation improve if businesses were sustainable? Would our economy?
* What does real sustainability—within a business context—look like?

The sustainable business community, quite frankly, would also benefit from the watchdog function of the independent media. How many businesses call themselves sustainable but are not? When is sustainability used only as a marketing tool, with results that do not actually make the world or its people better?

The Need for Sustainable Business Beats

In order to answer these and other questions, independent media will need to understand business and sustainable business from the inside out. However, because independent media largely set itself up as an anti-business force, few reporters in this sector understand business dynamics from the business point of view. They are skilled at finding corruption—especially when it involves the SEC or campaign violations—but not at understanding business fundamentals. Such knowledge would strengthen the reporting of the independent media on all aspects of business, including profit-first corporate business as well as sustainable business.

The solution is to create a fund to train reporters at independent outlets. Ten reporters from ten outlets would be selected for this training. They would be paired with a mentor in the business world, who could answer basic business questions. And they would attend a series of 8 business briefings created by the Media Consortium and open to all Media Consortium member outlets. Each reporter would be expected to write at least 3 in-depth stories and 10 business briefs during the course of the year.

Outlets are granted $3000—the usual payment to a freelance reporter for one in-depth story--as an incentive to enroll reporters in this program and to publish these business stories. The result is that after one year we not only have trained 10 reporters, but also have created the capacity and expectation at these outlets that they will regularly publish reporting on sustainable businesses.

The Media Consortium has experience with this model. We are currently in our second year of training a cohort of 10 reporters in a media policy beat as part of our Media Policy Reporting and Education Project, funded by the Media Democracy Fund. We have the capacity to implement a Sustainable Business Education and Reporting Project immediately.

Requirements

This proposal addresses both halves of the sustainable business story: the need for business leaders to become better storytellers, and the need for media outlets to become better trained and educated to report these stories. The proposal thus divides funding between these two needs. The grant will be administered by the American Sustainable Business Council.

ASBC New Economy Media Project Management $

(Selection of leaders for media training and mentorship

oversight of entire program, grant reporting requirements)

Media Training by Grit TV $

Cost per training

TMC Sustainable Business Reporting Project Management $10,000

(Creation of 8 briefings, selection of media outlets,

Ensuring reporters/outlets fulfill terms of grant)

Mini-grants to Media Outlets $30,000

(Assumes participation of 10 outlets @ $3000 each)

Overhead/Bookkeeping $

(TMC is charged 7% by our fiscal sponsor)

Total Requested $

**Building the Media capacity of New Economy Business Leaders**

Organizational Descriptions

**American Sustainable Business Council**

The American Sustainable Business Council (ASBC) is committed to creating a vision and framework that advances policies to support a vibrant, just and sustainable economy. Founded in 2009, ASBC and its organizational members represent more than 100,000 businesses and more than 200,000 individual entrepreneurs, owners, executives, investors and business professionals across the United States. These diverse business organizations cover the gamut of local and state chambers of commerce, microenterprise, social enterprise, green and sustainable business groups, local living economy groups, women business leaders, economic development organizations and investor and business incubators. The diverse set of partners work at the national, state and municipal level. ASBC is a lean organization, and has accomplished a great deal in a very short amount of time with limited resources. It is remarkably nimble and responsive to the needs of its partners and the changing political climate.

**The Media Consortium**

**Grit TV**