



# Sustainable Brands Collaboratory

A forum for working together to create a flourishing future

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## Summary

The Sustainable Brands (SB) Collaboratory is a multi-stakeholder collaboration initiative that will bring together individuals from throughout the SB community representing marketing, product management, design & innovation, communications & PR, advertising, sustainability and CSR to collectively address some of the most challenging obstacles facing brands as they work to deliver value through innovation for sustainability. These individuals will form cross-brand, cross-industry and cross-functional teams and will work together throughout the year to produce impactful and actionable outcomes that can be utilized to advance the shift to a sustainable economy.

## Background

In 2006 Sustainable Brands launched with the conviction that brands are in a unique position to lead the way to a flourishing future. We're proud of the community that has emerged around this vision, and have been inspired and moved by our individual and collective efforts to profitably innovate for sustainability. We also recognize the need for more in-depth conversations and collaboration on issues which are critical to moving the agenda forward but which are too large and complex to act on alone. We believe the Sustainable Brands community is uniquely equipped to convene leaders and experts to take action. We are currently looking for members and other partner organizations to fund and participate in a forum for collaborating to overcome obstacles to integrating sustainability into leading brands and encouraging the shift to a sustainable economy.

## The Concept

The Sustainable Brands Collaboratory is based on the "Co-Create" idea generated during SB'12. It is a forum for exploring and establishing (or co-designing/creating) emergent key tenets, capabilities, behavioral norms and structures that will empower brands to succeed by enabling new forms of value creation and consumption. The Collaboratory provides a facilitated structure to do this work.

The Collaboratory will align dedicated groups of SB community members in face-to-face and virtual meetings to incubate ideas, test hypotheses, and share potential solutions to identified obstacles impeding our goal to help brands prosper while leading the way to a better future.

The goal of the Collaboratory is to achieve results, rather than mere conversation. Many organizations have endeavored to discuss the issues to be explored by the Collaboratory; however, it is the mission of SB to make a tangible and quantifiable difference. The SB



Collaboratory is a unique experiment in creating significant culture change leading to a sustainable economy. As such, the results of this effort might be unpredictable. Examples of successful outcomes might take the form of: case studies, partnerships, new business models, digital experiences, tools/processes, IP (paper, policy, north star, checklist), new networks or businesses (startups), manifesto, mini-movement, paradigm shift, measurable impact, communications pieces: stories, mass-media coverage or other.

There are many touchpoints for the SB community throughout the year, and Initiative Proposals (see below) may arise and be activated at any time; however Proposals should be timed to leverage planned community meetings (SB events and member meetings) to work on initiative design, propose and secure support for new initiatives, convene initiative teams to make forward progress, and/or report out on progress to the assembled community where it makes sense. Initiatives may propose to tackle problems that would require significant time to fully solve; however, teams will be encouraged to design proposals with discrete outcomes that can be delivered within 12-month timelines. Maintaining concrete goal-setting with an annual time horizon will help ensure focus on action, better enable funding, and provide a defined exit strategy for parties involved to prevent lock-in. This timeline also allows for the continual refresh of ideas and participants, and acknowledges that once incremental milestones are met, new Initiative milestones/deliverables can be proposed through subsequent Initiative Design Briefs that build on completed work.

## Collaboratory Pilot Structure and Process

The SB Collaboratory is an experiment in collective engagement. As such, it relies on the desire and willingness of members to participate. Assuming a critical level of engagement (both participation and funding) is reached, we will test the concept in the first year, learn from the experience, evaluate success, and redesign as necessary.

The Collaboratory will be led by a dedicated Subcommittee of the Sustainable Brands Advisory Board. The board is comprised of 45 representatives of member companies, NGO's, and solutions providers as well as a cross section of thought leaders from various disciplines. The Collaboratory will include a formalized selection process for identifying concrete initiatives to be addressed, small teams to do the work, and funding to support the team/work throughout the year. This document provides an outline of the structure as it is presently envisioned.

## Collaboratory Initiative Selection

Initiative Proposals will be collected throughout the year via Committee meetings, Member meetings or other SB forums. Proposals which meet an initial threshold of relevance to the Sustainable Brand Community's key areas of exploration will be put through an Initiative Design Process (see "Initiative Design Process" below) and ultimately presented to the community for support. Initiatives to be pursued will be selected based on criteria such as:

- Demonstrated and expressed need within the community, particularly among corporate member companies
- Broad support and interest: champion, funding support, etc.
- Applicability to a diverse set of industries and brands



- Ability to deliver concrete, actionable outcomes, ideally with associated success metrics
- Alignment with Sustainable Brands' Core 3-Point Agenda:
  - To design and demonstrate new ways to deliver measurable shared value through environmental and social innovation
  - To explore and enable disruptive innovation that drives growth and supports the shift to a sustainable economy
  - To better understand and drive the shift in consumer demand & behavior toward healthy, sustainable lifestyles and consumption

Examples of ideas that could be explored by the Collaboratory might include, but are not limited to:

- Advanced consumer sentiment and/or behavior research
- Incorporating sustainability into advertising creative briefs
- Metrics for calculating the effects of an organization's sustainability commitment on human capital recruitment and retention, such as potential cost-savings
- Driving a shift or shifts in consumer culture/behavior, for example away from purchasing low quality, high quantity toward purchasing low quantity, high quality

## Initiative Design Process

As ideas that might be appropriate for Collaboratory consideration are identified and presented to Sustainable Brands staff and the Collaboratory Sub-Committee, they will be vetted for appropriateness, and upon approval, put to a voluntary, self-selected group of community members to develop a preliminary Initiative Design Brief (see related document: *Initiative Design Brief Guidelines*). This process may occur at any time prior to and/or onsite at any SB event or meeting. Once a completed Design Brief is received, it will be presented to the community via direct communication with Corporate Members and potentially via SustainableBrands.com. If/when sufficient support is identified the Proposal will be further shared as appropriate to invite further community participation. The process should progress as follows:

1. Collection: Initiative ideas will be collected throughout the year through various SB venues.
2. Review: Proposals will be reviewed on an ongoing basis, and refined by the Collaboratory Subcommittee. Proposals may be vetted against the SMART Criteria:
  - S = Specific
  - M = Measurable
  - A = Attainable
  - R = Relevant
  - T = Timely
3. Initiative Design: Once an idea is deemed appropriate for the Collaboratory, the generator of the initiative idea can move to complete an Initiative Design Brief, with or



without the participation of other community members. See the related document *Initiative Design Brief Guidelines* for instructions on how to create a thorough Design Brief.

4. **Pitch:** If necessary, design teams will present finalized Initiative Design Briefs to the broader community for formal commitment from and/or recruitment of interested supporters.
5. **Execution:** Interested parties take responsibility (see “Teams” below) and drive the Initiative through to completion.
6. **Report Out:** Deliverables will be shared with the broader Sustainable Brands Community through SustainableBrands.com and/or via presentation to appropriate community members.

## Teams

In some cases, the Initiative Design Team may ultimately become the Initiative Execution Team; however, opportunities may also be created through SB’s platform—either at an upcoming Sustainable Brands event, member meeting or online—for Initiative Design Teams to pitch finalized design briefs to the member community for additional resources. Interested parties will have the opportunity to form or join Initiative Execution Teams based on individual or corporate interests and resources (see participant profiles below) to take responsibility for the initiative and advance it through to completion. Once an Initiative Execution Team has completed the deliverables identified in the Design Brief, outcomes will be reported out to the community online as well as potentially at the next appropriate community event or meeting.

To ensure a meaningful outcome, each Initiative Execution Team should identify:

- **Initiative Champion/s:** Initiative Champion/s will contribute lead funding to the project and will receive the greatest visibility associated with communications about the project, and will have the opportunity for final say on the design/scope of the deliverable/s expected from the initiative. In addition, up to 3 members from each Champion organization may participate (dependent upon financial support provided, but limited to ensure pre-competitive collaboration) and Champion members will have the option to serve as leaders or delegate leadership of the initiative. At least one member of each Champion organization shall commit to participate in regular calls and any agreed upon meetings which will coincide with regularly scheduled member meetings and/or other SB conferences/events.
- **Initiative Supporter/s:** Initiative Supporter/s will contribute time and talent, as well as potential additional cash or in-kind support to the project and will also receive additional visibility as part of the initiative leadership team. Supporters will receive up to 2 seats on the Initiative Team, with at least one from each committed to participate in both calls and meetings as agreed by the team.
- **Initiative Team Members:** A limited number of other participants may be invited or accepted, depending on interest, (may include members or non-members) to also commit to participate in semi-annual workshops and virtual meetings as planned by the team. Team members may also be required to provide limited financial or in-kind



support, in the way of a participation fee or time and expertise, to ensure proper project resourcing. Eligibility will be determined by the needs of the Initiative and by invitation from the Initiative Leadership. Team members will each be acknowledged of their participation unless they request otherwise.

- **Sustainable Brands Collaboratory Administrator:** Each Collaboratory Initiative Team will require and receive support from the SB Collaboratory Staff Administrator.
- **Optional member-provided or funded facilitator and/or fellow:** If needed, an appropriate facilitator and/or fellow will be sourced by Sustainable Brands staff or the Initiative Champion/s and will be funded jointly by initiative participants to varying degrees, depending on roles and benefits sought and received.

## Anticipated Minimum Support Required

It is acknowledged that each initiative will require a minimum of resources in order to succeed. Sustainable Brands staff will provide the following resources to ensure Initiative success, pending necessary Initiative funding support:

- **SB staff/administrator:** will provide overall project coordination, participant recruitment support, technical and financial administration, and publication and distribution of any outcomes associated with the initiative. Staff administrator will handle all meeting scheduling, note taking and distribution, and report writing.

At a minimum, we anticipate each Collaboratory initiative will require \$20,000-35,000 in funding per year, depending on deliverables. This sum would cover:

- Sustainable Brands Administration, Management and Communications support: \$10,000-20,000
- Fellowship/Internship Fee: \$5,000/quarter
- Optional: External research, facilitation support, subject matter expertise, and/or external publication/communications (e.g. press releases): \$2,000-10,000

It is expected that this monetary or in-kind support will be derived annually as follows:

- Initiative Champion/s:
  - Members: \$10,000 (1 sponsorship will be included in Platinum membership and will be an option in Gold membership)
  - Non-Members: \$15,000
- Initiative Supporter/s:
  - Members: \$2,500
  - Non-Members: \$7,500
- Team Members or individual participants: Non-Members may choose to participate in initiatives at the basic Team Member level, and Members and Non-Members may add participants to any initiative which they sponsor (pending approval from the Initiative Champion and/or the Collaboratory Sub-Committee):
  - Additional Member seats or individual participant seats: \$2,500 per participant



The goal of the Collaboratory is to achieve impactful change across brands, functions and industries, and the projects may result in many different valuable outputs/outcomes which could be claimed, utilized or leveraged by participants. It is the intention of Sustainable Brands that the outcomes of the initiative deliverables be offered freely to the Sustainable Brands community and be available to the public domain, however timing of release of the insights, tools or deliverables to various stakeholders and the public can be proposed in the Initiative Design Brief and approved by the Initiative leadership team Champion and Supporters.

## Timeline and Continued Engagement

Sustainable Brands is more than a conference. It is a community—supported by events, member meetings, and an online platform—where its members gather to learn and co-create in various ways, depending on the current needs of the individual or brand. We believe that if the Collaboratory program is implemented successfully, the work of the teams will not only advance ideas and understanding on key issues, but will reinforce our commitment to sustainable brands year-round resulting in stronger ideas and outcomes, and a more engaged community.

The Collaboratory can be represented by two concentric cycles: one signifying the ongoing collection and design of Initiative Proposals, and one signifying Initiative Execution. While Initiatives may be launched at any time of the year, much of the work will revolve around SB events, member meetings and other SB community touchpoints. At these touchpoints, Proposals with sufficient support from the Proposal Cycle will be launched as Initiatives and will transfer to the Initiative Execution Cycle, to be replaced by new Proposals over the course of the year. Simultaneously, ongoing or completed Initiatives will be recognized, commended, and closed, as appropriate. These cycles can continue indefinitely.

While it is believed that these proposals/initiatives will be generated organically from individuals or organizations with a material and intrinsic interest in solving the related issues, there may be a further need to encourage sustained commitment. To serve this need, there will be numerous touchpoints throughout the year to acknowledge outstanding progress or milestone achievements and to collectively address any roadblocks encountered. Furthermore, the entire Collaboratory structure and process will remain under the oversight and guidance of the Collaboratory sub-committee of the Sustainable Brands Advisory Board who will continually review the effectiveness of the process and iterate on it as deemed necessary to enable more efficient and impactful outcomes.



## Initiative Development/Execution Cycle

1. Idea Collection
  - a. Ongoing throughout the year: collect and evaluate initiative ideas through member and advisory board conversations, at events and via SB's social media platforms.
2. Review & Circulation
  - a. Collaboratory Committee vets and prioritizes ideas against Collaboratory criteria and potential interest/impact. Approved ideas are then either returned to the idea generator to begin Initiative Design or they are circulated to the community to recruit volunteer participation in Initiative Design.
3. Design
  - a. Design Team forms to complete an Initiative Design Brief.
4. Pitch
  - a. Design Briefs are pitched to the community.
  - b. Teams self-select, organize roles and recruit resources.
5. Execution
  - a. Activities in support of initiative execution.
6. Concurrently: collect and evaluate next year Initiative ideas.
7. End of 12 months: Outcomes are documented and reported out to the community via SustainableBrands.com and at appropriate meetings or events. Initiative teams either disband or create new Design Briefs with updated scope, new deliverables and new resource requirements, and new teams form around the next phase of initiatives.



## Glossary

- **Initiative:** a concrete work plan to create discrete learning and outcomes against a specific identified obstacle
- **Initiative Champion:** individual/s or organization/s who contribute the greatest resources toward supporting execution of a specific Initiative
- **Initiative Design Brief (“Design Brief”):** a document clearly defining the objectives, scope and deliverables of a proposed Initiative in a way that can be used for recruitment of participants and resources from within the SB Community
- **Initiative Design Team:** a group of volunteers who offer to develop the Design Brief for a proposed Initiative
- **Initiative Execution:** all of the activities required to achieve the agreed upon goal/s of the Initiative, as outlined in the original Design Brief or in subsequent amendments
- **Initiative Execution Team:** the group of individuals who commit resources, time and/or funding to complete the objectives of an Initiative
- **Initiative Proposal:** an idea for an initiative that has been suggested or submitted via any venue or forum but does not yet have committed support for execution
- **Initiative Supporter:** individual/s or organization/s who also have significant interest in the Initiative and who contribute significant resources toward Initiative Execution
- **Initiative Team Member:** individual/s or organization/s who contribute only limited resources to the Initiative



## Contact Info

- **Lead inquiry contact**
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- **Collaboratory Committee**
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  - Jonathan Yohannan, Cone Communications
  - Gil Friend, Natural Logic
  - Jeff Mendelsohn, New Leaf Paper
  - R. Paul Herman, HIP Investor
  - Stephen Linaweaver, Blu Skye Consulting
  - Ellen Weinreb, Weinreb Group
  - Ted Howes, Cleantech Group
  - Coleman Bigelow, J&J
  - Sally Uren, Forum for the Future
  - Daniel Krohn, Becker Underwood
  - Sandy Skees, Communications4Good