



"SUSTAINABLE JERSEY" AND SIMILAR PROGRAMS FOR MUNICIPALITIES

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Sustainable Jersey (as of 2014)

Towns Registered to Pursue Certification	412
Towns Certified	139
Towns with Bronze Certification	117
Towns with Silver Certification	22
Sustainable Actions that Towns May Take towards Certification	128
Annual Operating Budget Around \$3,000,000	
Grants Dispersed (since '09)	\$1,407,000

QUESTION

How is the "Sustainable Jersey" program managed? Who are the stakeholders involved? What is the program's certification process? What types of actions qualify for certification? What grants does the program offer to communities? Does Connecticut have any similar programs?

SUMMARY

"Sustainable Jersey" is a nonprofit organization that, among other things, offers a certification for New Jersey towns that perform various sustainable actions, such as energy efficiency measures, climate change mitigation and planning, or waste management initiatives. Participating towns earn points for each action and are certified after reaching certain point totals and meeting other requirements.

Sustainability is commonly defined as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs. Sustainable Jersey identifies three concepts as interrelated components of sustainability: (1) supporting local economies and using community resources, (2) practicing responsible environmental management and conservation, and (3) contributing to a strong civil society that provides opportunities for all.

Sustainable Jersey developed as a collaboration between the Sustainability Institute at the College of New Jersey, New Jersey League of Municipalities, New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Task forces, which develop the list of actions towns can take, include representation from academia; the nonprofit sector; the business community; and state, local, federal, and county government.

Towns that wish to obtain certification from Sustainable Jersey must (1) pass an ordinance expressing intent to do so and designating a liaison; (2) establish a commission (i.e., a "green team") to coordinate efforts; and (3) accumulate points by performing various qualifying actions. Through its task forces and staff, Sustainable Jersey establishes sustainable actions, places them in categories, and designates some as priority actions. To earn bronze certification, a town must earn at least 150 points, perform two priority actions, and perform actions from at least six different categories. Silver certification requires 350 points, three priority actions, and actions in at least eight different categories.

Towns that have registered with the program get special priority access and notification of incentives and grants and are eligible for the Sustainable Jersey Small Grants Program. In 2013, the program distributed 22 "capacity building" grants and 12 larger project-based grants. Municipalities can also access the program's guidance tools and other resources, such as training workshops, webinars, and leadership meetings. Certified towns receive a customized Sustainable Jersey logo that can be used on the town's promotional material and are honored at an annual Sustainable Jersey luncheon at the New Jersey League of Municipalities Conference. Annual Sustainable Jersey awards are bestowed to towns that receive the most points or excel in leadership, innovation, and collaboration.

In Connecticut, two programs reward municipalities for various efforts related to sustainability, but they have a more narrow scope than Sustainable Jersey. The Clean Energy Communities program, administered by the Connecticut Green Bank, financially rewards participating communities for taking certain actions to promote greater energy efficiency and more widespread use of clean energy. The Green Circle Award, administered by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP), recognizes local governments, businesses, civic organizations and individuals who have participated in certain energy conservation, transportation, pollution prevention, or recycling-related activities or projects that promote natural resource conservation or environmental awareness.

SUSTAINABLE JERSEY

Management and Stakeholders

Sustainable Jersey initially operated as a public-private partnership. In 2011, the organization established a board of trustees and became a federally tax exempt 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. The Sustainability Institute at the College of New Jersey operates the program, in collaboration with the New Jersey League of Municipalities, New Jersey Board of Public Utilities, and New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection.

The College of New Jersey. Although “Sustainable Jersey” as an entity is owned by the nonprofit, Sustainable Jersey, staff are state employees of the College of New Jersey, under a contract between the nonprofit and the college. Sustainable Jersey currently has a staff of 16, including two co-directors, one assistant director, and several other program directors and managers.

New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. Department staff members assist in writing and defining the sustainable actions that towns can take, review submissions from towns, and provide other technical assistance, often through participation on task forces. The agency assists in reviewing sustainable actions developed by task forces and specifically participated in developing several sustainable actions for waste management, natural resources, and green design.

New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. The board provides \$500,000 annually in a non-competitive grant to Sustainable Jersey. Additionally, Sustainable Jersey created several sustainable actions and standards that require or encourage municipalities to use existing programs at the board’s New Jersey Clean Energy Program, which provides financial incentives and other programs to promote renewable energy and energy efficiency to utility customers, including municipalities. For example, to receive points for performing energy audits for municipal facilities, municipalities can conduct an energy audit and be fully reimbursed through the Clean Energy Program’s Local Government Energy Audit. They can then apply for additional funding from the Clean Energy Program to partially cover the costs of implementing the audit recommendations.

New Jersey League of Municipalities. The league holds at least five seats but no more than one-third of the total seats on the Sustainable Jersey board of trustees, as required by Sustainable Jersey’s by-laws. The league also promotes Sustainable Jersey programs and events to municipalities, honoring certified towns at annual events.

Board of Trustees. The board of trustees directs long-term strategy for Sustainable Jersey and also has several standing committees to address various issues. In addition to the league's members, the by-laws require the board to include (1) at least 10 members who represent business, nongovernmental organizations, academia, sustainability organizations, or some combination of them, and (2) five non-voting members that include representatives from the Department of Environmental Protection, Board of Public Utilities, and League of Municipalities.

Task Forces

As part of its certificate program, Sustainable Jersey manages 24 task forces, each covering a different sustainability topic. The task forces meet four to eight times per year to develop and recommend sustainable actions. State agency staff members often act as chairs of the task forces (e.g., Department of Environmental Protection staff members head the Climate Adaptation Task Force). Selected volunteers staff the task forces. Anyone can participate, but those interested in volunteering must submit an application detailing their relevant experience. Sustainable Jersey monitors the composition of task forces to ensure that one interest is not overly represented. According to the organization's website, task force members include representatives of academia; the nonprofit sector; the business community; and state, local, federal, and county government.

Sustainable Jersey asks task forces to:

1. ensure that sustainable actions are up to date and consistent with evolving government programs and science;
2. receive feedback from the municipalities and make improvements to sustainable actions;
3. identify obstacles to implementing sustainable actions that come from regulatory, financial, or other conditions that can be changed; and
4. engage in substantive research and policy development to produce new, cutting edge, sustainable actions and best practices.

Chairpersons of each task force participate on the Certifications Standards Committee, which reviews the actions that task forces create, both at a preliminary stage and as a more thorough review before approval. The chairperson of the Certifications Standards Committee is a member of the board of trustees, appointed by the chairperson of the board.

Certification & Qualifying Actions

[To begin](#) the certification process, a town must first pass a resolution that (1) states its intent to pursue Sustainable Jersey certification and (2) designates a person to be the formal liaison with the program. Once the resolution is adopted, the liaison must register with Sustainable Jersey and upload the resolution to the program’s website. The town must then create a “Green Team,” which is a commission created by the town’s governing body with the express purpose of coordinating the town’s sustainability efforts. Sustainable Jersey [recommends](#) establishing the Green Team by ordinance and including a wide range of participants on the team.

To earn Sustainable Jersey certification, participating towns accumulate points by performing various qualifying actions. The program allows a town to choose from over 125 point-earning sustainable actions in 17 different categories. Eleven of these actions are considered “priority” actions. The program offers bronze and silver certification levels. To earn bronze certification, a town must earn at least 150 points, perform two priority actions, and perform actions from at least six different categories. Silver certification requires 350 points, three priority actions, and actions from at least eight different categories. Table 1 lists the 17 categories and the priority actions within them (when applicable).

Table 1: Sustainable Jersey Action Categories and Priority Actions

Action Category	Priority Action
Animals in the Community	N/A
Arts & Creative Culture	N/A
Brownfields	N/A
Climate Mitigation & Adaptation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify the town’s vulnerability to flooding and ways to improve its overall resiliency. Measure the amount of greenhouse gas emissions the town produces and detail the sources of emissions so that actions can be focused on the largest emitters.
Community Partnership & Outreach	N/A
Diversity & Equity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Assess and consider the degree of inclusivity and representation on municipal boards and commissions.
Energy Efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Measure, benchmark, and track municipal buildings’ energy performance through tools like the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s (EPA) Energy Star Portfolio Manager. Inventory buildings, assess them for eligibility for programs offering funding or financing for upgrades, and enroll in one or more applicable programs.
Food	N/A

Table 1: -Continued-

Action Category	Priority Action
Green Design	N/A
Health & Wellness	N/A
Innovation & Demonstration Projects	N/A
Land Use & Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pass a resolution that affirms a town's intent to support sustainable smart growth land-use policies.
Local Economies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer marketing and promotional support, and sometimes financial and regulatory incentives, to encourage local businesses to implement sustainable practices.
Natural Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compile text and visual information about an area's natural resource characteristics and environmental features to provide a baseline to measure and evaluate resource protection. • Pass water conservation ordinances to limit watering to two days per week and limit the hours when lawn watering or other irrigation can occur; grant local authority to impose additional limitations during emergency conditions.
Operations & Maintenance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluate current vehicles and equipment to better understand where efficiency might be improved; survey how the vehicles are used and their environmental impact and fuel usage.
Sustainability Planning	N/A
Waste Management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a network of readily accessible pharmaceutical drop-off locations for residents that possess drugs that they no longer wish to keep.

Source: Sustainable Jersey website, Actions, <http://www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/>

In addition to the priority actions listed in Table 1, each category contains numerous other actions that a town can choose to take to earn certification points. For example, a town can earn:

1. five points in the "animals in the community category" for implementing education programs to increase the understanding of and improve interactions with wildlife or domestic animals;
2. 10 points in the "arts and creative culture category" for compiling a creative assets inventory that lists associations, organizations, community gathering spaces, environmental assets, cultural activities, arts organizations, and individual artists; and
3. 20 points in the health and wellness category for building healthier communities by enrolling in the state's Mayors' Wellness Campaign and implementing certain programs to encourage physical activity.

To receive points for its actions, a town must meet specific requirements and provide specified documentation to verify the action. A list of all eligible actions and their requirements can be found at <http://www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/>.

Grants

Sustainable Jersey operates a Small Grants Program that provides funding to municipalities to take sustainable actions and make progress toward a Sustainable Jersey certification. Though Sustainable Jersey is not currently accepting applications for the Small Grants Program, it plans to begin a new cycle of funding within the next few months.

In 2013, Sustainable Jersey awarded \$2,000 “capacity building” grants to 22 towns for general operating support or direct costs associated with implementing Sustainable Jersey programs. The program also awarded larger grants to municipalities for specific projects, described in Table 2.

Table 2: Small Grants Program Awards (2013)

\$10,000 Grant Projects	\$20,000 Grant Projects
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Garden-to-Table Community Education Project for the Visitation Relief Center • Creating a Sustainable Community Vision and Goals for Ewing Township • Town of Hammonton Water Conservation Tax Credit/Rebate Program • Creation of an Essex County Green Team Network and Innovative Pilot Projects for Replication • “i-Tree” Assessment of Municipal Trees • Rain Garden Installation and Education Program • Paulinskill Watershed Project • Sustainable Winslow – Community Outreach 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sustainability Ordinance for the City of Camden • Lawrence Township Food Waste Recycling Program • Restore Hawk Rise • Bike Depot for Commuters

Source: Sustainable Jersey website, Small Grants Project, Past Projects, <http://www.sustainablejersey.com/grants/sj-small-grants/past-grantees/projects/>

In order to be eligible for these grants, New Jersey municipalities must, among other things, (1) be registered or certified with Sustainable Jersey, (2) have an active Green Team, and (3) commit to using the grant funding to implement an action eligible for points in the Sustainable Jersey program.

Separate from the Small Grants Program, Sustainable Jersey maintains a “Grants Portal” or searchable database of resources from other entities.

CONNECTICUT PROGRAMS

Connecticut does not have a program that certifies towns for taking broadly defined sustainable actions similar to Sustainable Jersey, but it does have programs that pursue similar results on a more limited scale. Most comparably, the Clean Energy Communities program administered by the Connecticut Green Bank (formerly the Clean Energy Finance and Investment Authority) financially rewards participating communities for taking certain actions to promote greater energy efficiency and more widespread use of clean energy. DEEP’s Green Circle Award program also recognizes towns and other entities that take certain actions related to energy conservation, transportation, pollution prevention, natural resource conservation, or environmental awareness.

Clean Energy Communities

Clean Energy Communities is a three-step program in which a community must (1) commit to the Clean Energy Communities pledge, (2) fulfill the pledge by taking certain actions to increase energy efficiency in municipal buildings and voluntarily support renewable energy, and (3) earn energy efficiency and renewable energy points to qualify for grants and free renewable energy systems. The pledge is non-binding; however its target goals must be met for a town to receive program grants. Complete details about the program can be found at <http://www.energizect.com/communities/programs/clean-energy-communities/>.

Pledge and Pledge Fulfillment. In the pledge, which must be signed by a town’s mayor, first selectman, or town manager, the town promises to:

1. reduce its municipal building energy consumption by 8% in FY 2014, 11% in FY 15, 14% in FY 16, 17% in FY 17, and 20% in 2018;
2. purchase at least 16% of its municipal building electricity from clean, renewable energy sources in FY 14, and increase the purchases by 1% annually to reach 20% in FY 18; and
3. promote energy efficiency and clean, renewable energy technologies in its community.

To fulfill the energy consumption portion of the pledge, a town must benchmark its municipal building energy use with the U.S. EPA's Portfolio Manager benchmarking tool, create a Municipal Action Plan to describe the town's plans to save energy, and meet certain documentation requirements. The town can meet its obligation to purchase renewable energy through a variety of actions that include:

1. installing a clean energy system at a municipal facility,
2. taking certain substitute actions that can reduce the amount of renewable energy that must be purchased, or
3. purchasing certain renewable energy certificates (RECs) (RECs are created for generating power from renewable energy. They can be sold separately from the power produced and are bought and sold on the regional wholesale electric market as one way of complying with certain renewable energy requirements in Connecticut and other states).

These substitute actions include:

1. opting into the Commercial Property Assessed Clean Energy (C-PACE) financing program (in which the Green Bank finances a commercial property owner's energy efficiency or renewable energy improvements with repayment through an assessment on the property and backed by a lien),
2. adopting certain measures to simplify the permitting and administrative processes for solar panel installations, and
3. entering into an Energy Savings Performance Contract (in which a town contracts with a third-party to make energy efficiency improvements and the third-party is paid from a portion of the subsequent energy efficiency savings).

Grants and Awards. Once a town is designated a Clean Energy Community, it can earn "energy efficiency points" toward Bright Ideas Grants and "renewable energy points" toward free clean energy systems. Towns that earn 100 energy efficiency points win grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$15,000 that can be used for energy-saving projects. Towns that earn 100 renewable energy points receive a 1 kilowatt (kW) clean energy system. Tables 3 and 4 show how energy efficiency and renewable energy points are awarded.

Table 3: Energy Efficiency Points

Points Awarded	Required Activity
4	For every 1% of a town's commercial or municipal entities participating in a Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund business or municipal program, such as the Small Business Energy Advantage or the Energy Opportunities program
6	For every 1% of a town's households that participate in the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund's Home Energy Solutions, Home Energy Solutions Income-Eligible, Residential New Construction, or Home Energy Solutions Home Performance with ENERGY STAR programs
8	For every 1% of a town's households that redeem rebates for energy-efficient technologies
1 to 10	Special project points for communities that host or promote a special energy conservation program or energy-saving project

Source: Energize Connecticut website, Clean Energy Communities, <http://www.energizect.com/communities/programs/clean-energy-communities/>

Table 4: Renewable Energy Points

Points Awarded	Required Activity
1	For each application for the Green Bank's residential Smart-E Loan, Cozy Loan, CT Solar Loan, or CT Solar Lease programs
3	For each completed residential energy project including renewable energy systems (other than solar hot water), fuel conversions, energy efficiency upgrades (excluding projects also funded by the Connecticut Energy Efficiency Fund), and electric vehicle charging systems
5	For each completed residential solar hot water system financed by the Green Bank
5	For each application for the Green Bank's commercial C-PACE, Project 150, Energy Savings Performance Contracting, or CT Solar Lease programs
20	For each completed commercial energy project including renewable energy systems, fuel conversions, energy efficiency upgrades, or electric vehicle charging systems financed by the Green Bank

Source: Energize Connecticut website, Clean Energy Communities, <http://www.energizect.com/communities/programs/clean-energy-communities/>

The Clean Energy Communities program also offers bonus awards such as:

1. a 3 kW solar panel installation for towns that receive the Clean Energy Leadership award,
2. a 1 kW solar panel installation for towns recognized as a Green Power Community by the U.S. EPA, and
3. an additional 50 to 200 renewable energy points for towns that make certain improvements to their solar permitting process by the end of 2014.

Green Circle Award

DEEP administers the Green Circle Award program to recognize local governments, businesses, civic organizations, and individuals who participate in certain energy conservation, transportation, pollution prevention, or recycling-related activities or projects that promote natural resource conservation or environmental awareness. Table 5 lists some of the Green Circle Award-eligible projects. Award recipients receive a window decal; certificate of commendation; and listings in press releases, DEEP's website, and other promotional material. Additional information about the award can be found at

http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2708&q=323940&deepNav_GID=1511.

Table 5: Sample of Green Circle Award-Eligible Projects

Project Category	Eligible Project
Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executing changes that reduce annual energy or water consumption rates by more than 15% • Designing and developing building projects that fulfill Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification requirements • Implementing clean energy generation projects with fuel cells or solar, geothermal, or wind power • Capturing and reusing methane from landfills • Purchasing renewable power for at least 20% of a business', government's, or institutional facility's energy demand • Completing a greenhouse gas inventory • Completing an Energy Star benchmarking of a building or qualifying for the Energy Star program • Incorporating Smart Growth principles into municipal regulations, ordinances, and plans
Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voluntarily converting or retrofitting existing diesel-powered fleet or off-road construction vehicles to significantly reduce air emissions • Promoting or sponsoring a company-wide or facility-wide employee commute program • Converting or purchasing fleet vehicles that run on natural gas, electricity, hybrid gas/electricity, or other alternative fuels or vehicles having a mileage rating of greater than 40 miles per gallon and an emission standard level of ultra-low or cleaner
Pollution Prevention and Recycling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Documenting and implementing a facility-wide pollution prevention plan • Successfully implementing an innovative and unique pollution prevention plan or recycling program that generates an environmental benefit • Executing an innovative purchasing program that promotes the procurement of recycled and environmentally preferable products • Implementing recycling specifications for construction and demolition waste in state- or municipally funded building projects • Separating organic material at schools or cafeterias for composting or animal feed

Table 5: -Continued-

Project Category	Eligible Project
Natural Resource Conservation and Environmental Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizing a river watch program • Sponsoring a river, beach, or neighborhood clean-up day • Promoting conservation and preservation of critical plant or animal habitats • Implementing habitat enhancements for fish or wildlife on public or private property

Source: DEEP website, Green Circle Award, http://www.ct.gov/deep/cwp/view.asp?a=2708&q=323940&deepNav_GID=1511

HYPERLINKS

Sustainable Jersey, Getting Started, <http://www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/getting-started/>, last visited September 16, 2014.

Sustainable Jersey, *Establishing Your Sustainable Jersey Green Team*, http://www.sustainablejersey.com/fileadmin/media/Grants_and_Resources/Green_Team_Resources/Getting_Your_Green_Team_Started/Establishing_Your_Green_Team.pdf, last accessed September 16, 2014.

Sustainable Jersey, Actions, <http://www.sustainablejersey.com/actions-certification/actions/>, last visited September 16, 2014.

EnergizeCT, Clean Energy Communities, <http://www.energizect.com/communities/programs/clean-energy-communities/>, last visited September 16, 2014.

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