

Sustainable Michigan Endowed Project (SMEP) Spring 2004 Forum Summary

June 7, 2004

The Sustainable Michigan Endowed Project (SMEP) was established by the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and Michigan State University in 2002 as a venue for research supporting sustainable development research with a Michigan-specific perspective. One of the goals of SMEP is to provide grant funds in a way to strategically implement necessary research to under gird a more sustainable Michigan.

The Sustainable Michigan Endowed Project (SMEP) held its first public event on April 22 & 23, 2004 at the Henry Executive Center on the campus of Michigan State University. Fifty-five participants attended the spring 2004 Forum. Invited participants were drawn from MSU faculty, graduate students, and non-academic professionals who were nominated by a SMEP Executive Committee member. The SMEP Executive Committee is comprised of Sandra Batie (chair), Soji Adelaja, Richard Bawden, Dave Beede, Tom Dietz, Mike Hamm, Chris Peterson, Joan Rose, and Paul Thompson.

Forum participants engaged in a facilitated process, led by Dr. Richard Bawden, where they created and examined scenarios about the future of Michigan's rural communities, ecosystems, landscapes, and economy. Information and ideas that emerged from these scenarios are being used to develop a research agenda, which will subsequently be considered by the Executive Committee for SMEP supported grants.

Forum participants suggested that SMEP-funded research should:

- *Address areas that are difficult to overcome with a single technology or policy "silver bullet" e.g., support research projects that demonstrate cross-disciplinary thinking; demonstrate systems thinking/application of systems science.*
- *Lead to changed behaviors that enhance the quality of life in Michigan i.e., support bold, innovative initiatives that have the potential to change the way we do something/see something; meet the test of promoting economic prosperity, social equity, and environmental protection; and be relevant to both policymakers and "real" people.*
- *Include partnerships with other groups; perhaps even encourage novel collaborations of "traditional adversaries" in order to create common space where new visions can be born; require all projects to include participation from partnerships between the public and private sectors; and invest in conversation and the process of how we approach bringing diverse groups to the table and allowing them to build trust, respect, and shared confidence.*

Specific research interest areas identified by Forum participants were:

- Agricultural production, food supply, and food security
- Energy and Alternative Technologies
- Eco-tourism
- Public Engagement and Awareness

- Social Disparity; Economic and Resource Distribution Issues
- Socio-political Implications of Sustainability
- Spatial Decision-making/Land Use Management
- Water Quality and Quantity

The objectives of SMEP are focused on research that supports sustainable development in Michigan and to that end; the SMEP Executive Committee has pledged to be catalysts for multidisciplinary research efforts. Multidisciplinary research needs partners from many disciplines. The Forum was designed to be a venue for bringing a diverse group of professionals together to meet and begin a dialog on sustainable development in Michigan. When Forum participants were asked what about this Forum was most valuable to them, nearly 75% of the participants indicated that the *opportunity for engaging with a diverse group and sharing diverse perspectives* was the greatest value of this Forum. As one participant put it, "real cross disciplinary discourse is rare – very refreshing; I found it very exciting intellectually to participate."

The SMEP Executive Committee members each lead a breakout group of participants through a "futuring" exercise designed to facilitate the exploration of plausible scenarios for a Michigan in the year 2024. Many Forum participants said that they gained a broadened and/or different perspective on Michigan's future by participating in the Forum. Participants also highlighted the significance of water in Michigan's future scenarios.

Prior to attending the Forum, participants were asked to describe what sustainable development means to them and if/how it is used in their work. When participants were asked what new vantage points or considerations were they taking from this Forum experience, many commented on the importance of the human element and the value and importance of social/political science in addressing sustainability.