

Green Economy Hub Pilot Rationale and Workplan

Collaboratively prepared by Collingwood Climate Action Team, Institute of Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County staff, with minor edits by Town of The Blue Mountains staff.

Opportunity

Sustainability is becoming a winning strategy for businesses and other organizations across Canada and Green Economy Hubs are playing a vital role. As part of a national network led by non-profit [Green Economy Canada](#), these Hubs help businesses from all sectors and sizes reach their sustainability goals, by providing support to bridge the knowledge and capacity gaps organizations often face when considering sustainability initiatives.

Together, with business and institutional members, their employees, and supporting partners, Green Economy Hubs prove the business-case for sustainability by demonstrating how reducing emissions, water, and waste can improve the bottom line, mitigate business risks, help develop a credible brand, and improve the ability to attract and retain consumers, shareholders, and top tier employees.

Through coaching, tools and resources, educational opportunities, peer networking, and celebration events, Green Economy Hubs help organizations to adapt and thrive in the transition to a sustainable, net-zero future.

With growing concern about climate change, recognition of the responsibilities that municipal governments, businesses, and nonprofits have towards our social and environmental sustainability, as well as the keen interest identified in the Southern Georgian Bay and Grey County areas, now is the perfect time to work with Green Economy Canada to explore how best to mobilize the green transition for local businesses. Our proposal is focused on a Pilot Project that will help assess local market interest for the kind of sustainability support offered by Green Economy Hubs by recruiting 20 local businesses and organizations to participate in a climate action cohort. The experience gained from this project will lay the groundwork for determining what kind of long-term sustainability support model might be well suited for businesses in our region, including the potential to establish our own local Green Economy Hub in the Bruce-Grey-Simcoe area.

Project Description

[Green Economy Canada](#) (GEC) is a national non-profit accelerating Canada's transition to a vibrant and inclusive net-zero future. They launch and grow Green Economy Hubs that bring together, support, and celebrate businesses of all sectors and sizes in setting and achieving sustainability targets. In doing so, they're creating stronger economies and more resilient communities across Canada.

In discussing the potential to bring a [Green Economy Hub](#) here in the Simcoe, Grey and Bruce Counties, Green Economy Canada has recommended starting with a pilot cohort that could lead toward creating a fully functioning Regional Hub to service the South Georgian Bay region and extend to the remainder of Grey County, Bruce County and other municipalities within the Simcoe County North.

This will allow us to confirm market interest and have local business champions to vouch for the value of the support to justify a larger investment in time, resources and costs to explore how best to continue supporting businesses in the region - whether through the development of a full fledged Hub, or a new customized delivery model. The success of the pilot program will lay the groundwork to determine how to bring deeper sustainability support to mobilize our local business community in climate action.

The [Collingwood Climate Action Team](#) (CCAT) has agreed to be the lead charitable, local partner to build awareness and support for the pilot cohort in the region. CCAT will work with Green Economy Canada and other key stakeholders in Southern Georgian Bay and Grey Bruce Counties to identify, cultivate, steward and secure a cohort of 20 organizations that will be supported to measure and reduce their carbon footprint through Green Economy Canada's program. To bolster the success of the initiative, a multi-sectoral partnership will be created with an Advisory Committee of up to seven members. This partnership will ensure a robust project as all members will provide knowledge, local context, contacts, marketing and other support to attract potential businesses to become aware, interested, and potentially join the Cohort Pilot.

The Cohort Pilot of businesses and organizations will gain membership in Green Economy Canada's network and will be guided through a process of measuring their carbon footprint, setting reduction targets and developing reduction strategies, and tracking progress towards their goals depending on the support options they choose. In doing so, these organizations will become more resilient and competitive in the global net-zero transition while also contributing to achieving local and national climate goals. Businesses and organizations will:

- Lower operational costs through energy, water, and waste reduction
- Strengthen brand identity and customer loyalty
- Attract more customers and clients
- Mitigate business risks and costs related to climate change
- Attract and retain employees.

Cohort participants will have access to 1:1 guided support, tools, training and resources, capacity-building events, peer learning opportunities, and recognition for the efforts they are making.

Collectively, with Green Economy Canada as the lead program services partner, Collingwood Climate Action Team as the local charitable supporting organization leading on-the-ground recruitment and awareness-building efforts, and the multi-sectoral local Advisory Committee, we are poised to make the pilot cohort a success and build momentum towards a local low carbon economy in our region. This pilot project will act as a proof of concept of market interest for this kind of support in the region, and act as an important precursor to further exploring a local Green Economy Hub or a customized on-going support model for our local business community.

The SGB Cohort Pilot Project will run from June 2024 - December 2025 with up to two pilot cohort groups of 8-12 local businesses per cohort. Each business will select one of two track memberships - Lead or Insight Track Members (see attachments for description of each) - depending on their needs and interests.

GEC and CCAT would start by seeking out interested organizations to participate, ideally launching the first cohort in the late Fall of 2024 and a second cohort by Spring (around Earth Day) 2025. These two cohorts would work through the GEC program moving towards sustainable business practices and benefits. This will provide time, experience and feedback recruiting and working with the local business community up to the end of 2025. As we near the end of the pilot we will gather feedback from cohort participants, discuss learnings on local business and stakeholder interests, and determine whether to move forward post-pilot with developing a long-term support model for the local business community beyond 2025 (Green Economy Hub or otherwise).

Target Geography

The following areas will be targets for active engagement.

- Collingwood (Simcoe)
- Wasaga Beach (Simcoe)
- Clearview (Simcoe)
- Town of Blue Mountains (Grey)
- Meaford (Grey)
- Grey Highlands (Grey)
- Owen Sound (Grey)

Active engagement includes direct outreach to warm leads and businesses who are good candidates for the pilot cohort: own their facilities, have supportive leadership, mission aligned, strong business case for sustainability. Outreach will also be done through business networks such as Chambers of Commerce, Business Enterprise Centres and Business Improvement Associations. Events will be held in key communities, to bring businesses together to learn about the program.

Passive engagement will be undertaken in the following areas

- Chatsworth
- Georgian Bluffs
- Hanover
- Southgate
- West Grey

Because the current capacity of CCAT is limited, they cannot undertake active engagement everywhere at once. Businesses in these areas will be informed about the pilot program through newsletters and social media. If they reach out to get more information, staff will follow up and continue to engage with them as they learn more and potentially join the pilot cohort. Additional resources may allow for more active engagement in these areas in the future.

Roles and Responsibilities

Green Economy Canada (GEC)

- Lead program services and direct support activities with cohort members
- Provides direction and support to CCAT on business engagement strategy
- Provides guidance, materials, scripts, key messages for business development and holds individual 1-1 meetings with prospective members
- Leads the Cohort pilot groups through a guided support model of carbon measurement, developing reduction targets and strategies, and implementing plans depending on the

membership track-type selected (Lead and Insight) and provides all supporting materials, workshops, and other services.

- Announce cohorts and work being undertaken by local businesses in SGB via GEC channels once cohorts are formed
- Include partnership and thanks to local funders and stakeholders in GEC's Annual Report released in 2025

Collingwood Climate Action Team (CCAT)

- Supporting charitable organization at the local level leading business development, partnership development, and awareness-building
- Provision of resources (paid and volunteer) to undertake the business engagement efforts to seek members for the Pilot Cohort groups
- Business engagement to seek and acquire business interest to join a cohort pilot team.
- Participate in 1-1 pitch meetings hosted by GEC for prospective members
- Connect with other key stakeholders including Chamber of Commerces, BIAs, Economic Development, Georgian Bay Business Centre, RTO7, Tourism supports and other key business organizations to promote the cohort opportunity
- Host local recruitment events to gain business interest, awareness and support - either in partnership with chamber of commerces or other business network groups, economic development centres and other business support by the municipalities
- Provide local level support during the cohort pilot process.
- Provides administrative support and local profile building of the cohort opportunity in collaboration with GEC, including through website, media, engagement and other communications activities as relevant
- Work with GEC and SGB Pilot Advisory Group to develop a report on the Pilot program for funders.
- Charitable entity with ability to issue tax receipts for funders, administration, and oversight.

Multi-sector Advisory Group

- Provide funding or other resources
- Background support to CCAT during the project to build awareness and champion cohort opportunity
- Help with identifying potential businesses and other contacts at each local municipal level - government, BIAs, chambers and other business relationships of value, non-profit organizations)

- Provide regional/local context of needs, businesses, organizations and other potential local supporters

Grey County

- Provide funding from the Climate Outreach capital budget. Recommending \$5000 in 2024.
- Participation in the multi-sector advisory group (when it is formed)
- Provide credibility for the project by sharing information with potential participants through County communication channels (e.g. Climate Action newsletter, Business Enterprise Centre, Economic Development department).

Municipal Support

Why Green Economy Hub?

The Green Economy Hub is not sector specific, any business or organization can join. In supporting this program, we can provide a service to any business who is interested in achieving sustainability and GHG reductions. We aren't choosing some sectors to support while neglecting others.

The Green Economy Hub model is locally based and nationally connected. There are no other programs that put a local network as a top priority. Grey businesses will have the opportunity to connect with one another across sectors – growing and strengthening the local green economy. Other business sustainability programs may support the businesses, but they don't necessarily support growing the local network.

The primary target for the Green Economy Hub is small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs – less than 500 employees). SMEs have low capacity to take action independently. They typically do not have a sustainability expert on staff and Grey County does not have capacity to meaningfully engage these businesses individually.

Green Economy Hub provides ongoing support with a focus on GHG reduction, and potential for other sustainability projects. They are not a consultant, whose work is over once the report is delivered. It is not a DIY toolkit that puts all the responsibility on the business to make changes. Because the program requires public reporting and targets, it is not “greenwashing” where a business can say they are green without actually doing anything.

Alignment with Going Green in Grey

Through the Green Economy Hub, Grey County can engage the business community in the priority actions identified in “Going Green in Grey,” such as Action 5: Waste Diversion, Action 7: Zero-Emission Vehicles, Action 13: Non-residential Building Energy Efficiency Retrofits, and Action 14: Renewable and Emerging Energy Technologies. The Green Economy Hub can also serve key sectors: Action 3: Sustainable Agriculture, and Action 20: Sustainable Tourism. Perhaps most importantly, by delivering education and services to the business community, Green Economy Hub supports Action 19: Climate Action Engagement.

Other Municipalities

The Town of The Blue Mountains and the Town of Collingwood have both been asked to support Phase 1 of this pilot project. Across the country, municipalities typically support their local Green Economy Hubs, including:

- Waterloo Region, City of Waterloo, City of Kitchener – Impact Network (2009)
- City of Hamilton, City of Burlington - Hamilton Burlington Sustainability Leadership Program (2013)
- York Region, City of Vaughan, Town of Newmarket – Climate Wise Business Network (2016)
- City of Edmonton – Corporate Climate Leaders Program (2018)
- City of London – Green Economy London (2019)
- City of Peterborough, Peterborough County, Township of Selwyn – Green Economy Peterborough (2021)
- City of Moncton, Province of New Brunswick - Green Economy New Brunswick (2021)
- City of Calgary - Green Economy Calgary (2024)