



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Sustainability for the Nation

Description

Link to the National Academies Report, *Sustainability for the Nation*

Body

A "sustainable society," according to one definition, "is one that can persist over generations; one that is far-seeing enough, flexible enough, and wise enough not to undermine either its physical or its social system of support." As the government sector works hard to ensure sufficient fresh water, food, energy, housing, health, and education for the nation without limiting resources for the future generations, it's clear that there is no sufficient organization to deal with sustainability issues. Each federal agency appears to have a single mandate or a single area of expertise making it difficult to tackle issues such as managing the ecosystem. Key resource domains, which include water, land, energy, and nonrenewable resources, for example, are nearly-completely connected yet different agencies exist to address only one aspect of these domains.

The legendary ecologist John Muir wrote in 1911 that "when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe." Thus, in order for the nation to be successful in sustaining its resources, "linkages" will need to be built among federal, state, and local governments; nongovernmental organizations (NGOs); and the private sector. The National Research Council (NRC) was asked by several federal agencies, foundations, and the private sector to provide guidance to the federal government on issues related to sustainability linkages. The NRC assigned the task to a committee with a wide range of expertise in government, academia, and business. The committee held public fact-finding

meetings to hear from agencies and stakeholder groups; examined sustainability management examples; conducted extensive literature reviews; and more to address the issue. Sustainability for the Nation: Resource Connection and Governance Linkages is the committee's report on the issue.

The report includes insight into high-priority areas for governance linkages, the challenges of managing connected systems, impediments to successful government linkages, and more. The report also features examples of government linkages which include Adaptive Management on the Platte River, Philadelphia's Green Stormwater Infrastructure, and Managing Land Use in the Mojave.

[Read *Sustainability for the Nation*](#)

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