

NEW NETWORK INFORMATION KIT



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Welcome Letter

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If you are reading this, you likely want to see in your hometown a new community-based business network that focuses on 21st century sustainable industries, green jobs, and thinking “Local First.” You are ready to grow into being the local living economies we need. Congratulations on recognizing the importance of this issue and for your efforts to take action. It is going to take us all!

Every week, we hear from new leaders eager to explore the potential for a BALLE network in their communities. We also hear from an increasing number of leaders around the world interested in bringing the local living economies approach to their regions. This information kit is designed to provide such communities with an overview of our approach, our services, our networks, and our application process.

We welcome you to explore our “local living economies” approach and join us in North America’s fastest growing network of socially responsible businesses! BALLE is currently comprised of over 80 community networks in over 30 U.S. States and Canadian provinces representing over 22,000 business members across the U.S. and Canada.

Since BALLE’s founding in 2001, cities and towns embracing living economy principles have increased their economic vitality through greater community wealth and green jobs; improved their level of self-reliance and underlying sustainability; and mobilized diverse groups to work together including entrepreneurs, activists, professors, and policymakers.

This is a key moment of change. We know local living economies represent a viable path forward. But we also understand that for this approach to dramatically ramp up and be an accessible, real solution for communities of every geographic, racial, economic, and political stripe, we must go further, faster.

To this end, we are working to synthesize best practices and lessons learned, deepen peer learning between networks, and provide you with access to an ever-growing set of proven tools for creating change in your community.

We are the ones we have been waiting for. Join us!

To creating a world that works for all,

Michelle Long

Executive Director, Business Alliance for Local Living Economies

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Why:

**The Need for Community
Networks of Independent
Businesses**

Why: The Need for Community Networks of Independent Businesses

A Time of Challenge and Opportunity

A note from Executive Director Michelle Long

“New challenges require new solutions. Today’s economic systems aren’t working for the majority of people and living things on this planet, and the approaches, organizations and institutions that brought us these results, are not the same ones that will lead us in a new direction.

“We can’t solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them.”

~ Albert Einstein

We need transformation. We need our economies to work for our communities. We need entrepreneurial innovation to make our economies sustainable for all living things. We need fair and just economies where “good jobs” and “green jobs” are one and the same.

Today, across this country, in every state, there are new alliances of local entrepreneurs who are focused not simply on the single bottom lines of individual enterprise, but rather on the overall health of their hometowns. These independent business networks are transforming their economies into community-centered, green, and fair places to live and work through a focus on green jobs, sustainable industries, investing locally, and buying local first.

The path to transformation is already underway and is being led by a new kind of community business network, innovating at the community level, and collaborating regionally and globally. We believe this solution is exactly what today’s challenges call for.”

Why Local Ownership Matters

Business ownership matters because a dollar spent locally will recycle through the economy many times over. This holds true for consumers buying goods and services from locally based businesses or local owners and entrepreneurs who source from their local counterparts. This is called the “economic multiplier” – the benefits that flow from a dollar circulating many times in a community. Higher local spending means a higher economic multiplier.

Most businesses – local and nonlocal – hire local people and pay taxes. But locally owned businesses contribute significantly greater levels of income, wealth, jobs, taxes, and charity to a community.

Local business benefits our communities in other ways. Compared to their national competitors, local independent businesses often give greater support to a community’s non-profit and civic needs. They are better positioned to

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respond to the special needs of the community, and they are more tied to the community's future. Additionally, unlike a homogenized Anyplace, USA, a community with vibrant independent businesses retains its unique character as a great place to live and visit.

As noted by author and economist Michael Shuman, BALLE director of research and public policy, there are four strong arguments for why locally owned businesses contribute more to the economy than other businesses:

- **First, local businesses don't move.** They're reliable generators of wealth for the local community. Local governments often focus on attracting or retaining big corporations, only to find that at some point down the road they flee. Local businesses stick around and generate income for years and often generations.
- **Second, local businesses have a higher economic multiplier.** What this means is that a dollar spent at a local business tends to circulate in the local economy longer. A study of economic multipliers was conducted in Austin, Texas that showed when a person spent \$100 at a Borders bookstore, \$13 stayed in the local economy. When the books were purchased at a locally owned bookstore, \$45 out of the \$100 re-circulated locally. Many similar studies have been conducted and they all point to the same conclusion. (See below.)
- **Third, local businesses have a size and character that is consistent with leading theories of what makes a community flourish.** People want walkable communities. Megamalls aren't compatible with this, but small and home-based locally owned businesses are. Communities built around locally owned businesses are also more appealing to the so-called "creative class," a term coined by the social scientist Richard Florida to describe knowledge workers and other "creatives." These people are a key driving force of economic development, and they're drawn to communities that are diverse, entrepreneurial, and fun to live in – in short, communities with lots of locally owned businesses. In addition, tourists tend to be drawn to local businesses.
- **Fourth, local businesses have a smaller carbon footprint.** Inputs and markets for local businesses tend to be more local. Plus producing a good or service locally or choosing a neighborhood business can bring down the emissions associated with transportation.

The Economic Multiplier and Local Ownership

A number of economic studies have confirmed the value to communities of their locally owned businesses, the importance of choosing local first, and the

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impact of Local First campaigns on the economic health of various communities.

The following are just a few of the growing number of studies that have demonstrated the higher economic multiplier that local businesses yield: As mentioned above, in 2002 Civic Economics (a cutting-edge economic development group) analyzed the relative impact of a proposed Borders bookstore in Austin, Texas, as compared to two local bookstores.

The researchers found that one hundred dollars spent at the Borders would circulate thirteen dollars in the Austin economy, while the same one hundred dollars spent at either of the two local stores would circulate forty-five dollars. The study suggested that every dollar spent at the local store contributed three times the jobs to the local economy, three times the boost to income, three times the tax benefits.

In 2004, Civic Economics improved its methodology and completed another study of Andersonville, a neighborhood in Chicago. The principal finding was that a dollar spent at a local restaurant generated 25 percent more economic multiplier than a chain. The local advantage was 63 percent higher multiplier for local retail, and 90 percent higher for local services.

In 2007, Civic Economics did its most in-depth study yet, encompassing the City of San Francisco and neighboring communities of South San Francisco, Colma, and Daly City. Looking at books, toys, sporting goods, and fast food, the researchers found that if San Franciscans shifted just 10 cents of every dollar of their spending from chain stores to local retailers, they could add to the city's economy nearly 1,300 more jobs and \$200 million more in annual output. The bad news is this: If ten percent of local purchasing drifts to the chains, the San Francisco region could lose 1,300 jobs and \$200 million of annual output.

Still not convinced? We invite you to review the results of a range of additional studies on the impact of local ownership at:

<http://www.livingeconomies.org/netview/resources-and-studies/LFstudies>.

Defining Sustainable Business

The term “sustainable development” was popularized by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED)’s report, *Our Common Future*, published in 1987. Since that time, “sustainability” has become a buzz word. At BALLE, it’s more than a vague idea or aspiration – it’s the organizing and integrating principle of how we approach our work. Sustainability for BALLE is an economy that fosters vibrant communities, a healthy natural environment, and prosperity for all.

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Everyone affects the sustainability of the marketplace and the planet in some way. Sustainable businesses strive toward a triple-bottom line, balancing financial, social and environmental performance. They adopt practices and principles that aim to improve the quality of life of their employees, customers, communities and the environment.

A Note from Judy Wicks, BALLE co-founder, chair, and founder of the White Dog Café

A socially, environmentally and financially sustainable global economy must be composed of sustainable local economies. The Local Living Economies movement is building a decentralized global network of local living economies made up of independent, sustainable, community-based businesses. It brings together the movements for sustainable agriculture, green building, new urbanism, community capital, renewable energy, independent media, and local arts and culture into one holistic vision for sustainable communities.

"A socially, environmentally and financially sustainable global economy must be composed of sustainable local economies."

~Judy Wicks

By working cooperatively, locally-owned businesses and conscious consumers can bring power back to our communities by building sustainable local economies – “living” economies that support both natural and community life.

Many new sustainable business opportunities lie within the “building blocks” of local living economies – local food and fiber systems, renewable energy, alternative transportation, locally designed and made clothing, recycling and reuse, green construction, holistic healthcare, eco-friendly cleaning products, independent retail, and neighborhood tourism.

Addressing the deeper needs of their communities, sustainable business owners can provide more fulfilling jobs, healthier communities and greater economic security in their region. Success can mean more than growing larger or increasing market-share, it can be measured by increasing happiness and well being, deepening relationships, and expanding creativity, knowledge, and consciousness.

An Inclusive Agenda

We should be clear: BALLE does not seek to alienate non-local businesses from partnering with us to create local living economies, nor are we looking to rid our communities of non-local enterprise. Rather, we aim to enhance our

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communities, economies and environment through the benefits that locally owned businesses provide.

A focus on local business is smart, but not because nonlocal companies are immoral, bad, or unproductive. Economic logic suggests that the strongest community is one in which local businesses maximize sales to local markets *and* maximize sales to global markets. Local production and global production together produce wealth. Take away either, and an economy suffers.

Localization advocates seek two very different goals: (1) Increase the number of locally owned businesses in one's own community, whether the firms sell local or global. (2) And encouraging citizens to buy "Local First". Our campaign slogan is not "Local Only," nor "Local, Whatever the Cost" – but "Local First." Strong local markets prepare some companies for going global, without giving away the diversified businesses necessary for local economic success.

The local living economies movement is also decidedly non-isolationist. We aim to improve the prosperity of every community, around the world, by maximizing opportunities for locally-owned businesses.

In the words of Michael Shuman, “the more we nurture and support local, independent businesses, the more likely we will bring prosperity to all citizens – rich and poor, black and white, male and female, rural and urban, young and old. With greater prosperity for so many diverse groups, we also have a better shot at solving hundreds of other knotty problems bedeviling our society. If we are smart enough to globally share everything we learn about how locally owned businesses can succeed, and modest enough to learn about successful local business designs and strategies elsewhere, we can make major strides toward relieving global poverty and saving global ecosystems.”

Finally, we are a multipartisan movement. What local living economies stand *for* is much more important than what they may be *against*. Localization can and should appeal to right and left alike, by combining conservatives' passion for free markets, small business, and small government with progressives' passion for community empowerment, sustainability, and real democracy.

Who Benefits from Networks of Independent Businesses?

Many members of a community benefit from the presence of a BALLE network, starting with the business members themselves and reaching far beyond into many aspects of the local economy and society.

Here are a few of the common beneficiaries of a BALLE network, as captured by Sustainable Connections, an eight-year-old, Bellingham, Washington-based network now representing 700 business members:

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Business Owners and Network Members

Increased sales

- 83% of Sustainable Connections' 700 business members say the organization is "very or extremely effective at motivating local people to change their purchasing behaviors". This includes increasing demand for green building services & LEED, local food, energy efficiency and renewables, buying local, and businesses that are moving toward greater sustainability".
- 3 in 5 households in Bellingham have changed their purchasing behavior and now Think Local First.
- 91% of participating businesses now intentionally choose locally owned businesses first too.
- 70% of Sustainable Connections' members say they made new sales connections through the organization last year.

Increased motivation & support toward achieving greater sustainability

- 89% of Sustainable Connections' members say membership motivates them to improve the sustainability of their business practices.

Employee recruitment and retention

- Supporting local businesses in sustainable business practices and facilitating collaboration for the sustainability of their industry systems, meets the values of today's work force. Numerous studies have shown that businesses with "a positive reputation specifically in the areas of environment and human rights," see an increase in their ability to attract and retain staff.

New entrepreneurs

When the culture is one of thinking local first, entrepreneurs enjoy an atmosphere conducive to success. When people are rooting for the "locals" they are eager to give the new business a try.

Residents

A multitude of small businesses, each selecting products based not on a national sales plan but the needs of their local customers, means local accessibility to a wider diversity of goods and choices.

Creating a healthier economy and environment is something to enjoy today and is a legacy for future generations.

Greater self-determination means having a choice about the future of our communities.

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Local Government

When purchases are made locally rather than online or outside the area, governments benefit from an increased sales and property tax base. We all benefit from local government's ability to provide greater public services.

Local governments have multiple responsibilities and must make decisions that do "the most good for the most people". Rather than the classic "jobs vs. trees" debate, when business leads on "triple bottom line" approaches, it makes it easier for governments to meet their multiple goals too.

Local businesses more often choose to re-use buildings in town centers, compared to national businesses with a "formula" for building on the green fields outside of town. Local businesses in town centers make more efficient use of public services and tax dollars given the costs of infrastructure and police and fire protection that sprawling development requires.

Community non-profit organizations

Non-profits find more support. A study by the national federation of independent businesses showed that small businesses give 250% more per employee to non-profit organization than do big businesses. Non-profits also have a greater opportunity to meet their own mission when they find a mission overlap with new community business networks.

Academia/Schools

Today schools and universities are looking at how to integrate sustainability into their programs. Having a ready business network for partnerships including intern placements, guest speakers, and for 'service learning' is a great benefit.

Economic Development Organizations

With a defined focus, new community business networks can quickly pursue some of the fastest growing segments of many sectors of our economy – from sustainable agriculture to green building to renewable energy and energy efficiency. "Green jobs" are expected to represent 10% of all new job growth in the next few decades. Given the multitude of goals and programs at existing economic development organizations, a new partner with this dedicated focus can ensure communities stay current with these trends.

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The whole community benefits from improved quality of life!

Isn't that the point?

A new project of the Center for Communication and Civic Engagement, 'What's the Economy for, Anyway?' says, "While the United States ranks high in traditional economic measures, it ranks low in many other measures such as life expectancy, infant mortality, public transportation, vacation time, and environmental health".

They ask, "Is the economy simply about increasing the GDP or should it be about creating 'the greatest good for the greatest number for the longest time' as proposed a century ago by Gifford Pinchot, the first head of the National Forest Service."

BALLE networks of independent businesses connect people with a common purpose to transform the health and sustainability of their own local communities and economies. Many of our networks report this is tremendously empowering and affirming work.



What:

**About BALLE and
Our Networks**

What: About BALLE and Our Networks

Introduction to BALLE

The Business Alliance for Local Living Economies (BALLE) is North America's fastest growing network of socially responsible businesses, comprised of 80 community networks with over 22,000 independent business members across the U.S. and Canada.

BALLE networks create local living economies through the building blocks of independent retail, sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, green building, local zero-waste manufacturing, and community capital.

BALLE Mission

BALLE's mission is to catalyze, strengthen and connect networks of locally owned independent businesses dedicated to building strong Local Living Economies.

BALLE Vision

BALLE believes in the power of local businesses to transform communities for the better by working cooperatively toward a shared vision. We imagine cities and towns of every size and political stripe engaged in shared learning to build community assets – what we call the “building blocks” of living economies. We envision a time when local economies not only generate community wealth, but also are catalysts for civic action, social diversity and ecological health – for sustainable communities.

BALLE Origins

Since BALLE was formed in 2001, networks have come together in more than 30 U.S. states and Canadian provinces. In fact, BALLE has helped spawn a global movement for localization that, along with the work of related organizations like Transitions Towns and Slow Food, connects to thousands of community-based efforts occurring in almost every country.

When BALLE was formed, it provided a platform for socially responsible local businesses to be proactive with solutions, rather than feel helpless against the growing inequity and deepening environmental degradation brought on by the industrial global economy. BALLE's mission was to increase the opportunities of participating small businesses, teach them sustainable business practices, educate the public sector about the virtues of local purchasing and investing, and reshape economic development and public policy to be community-based, green, and fair – what we called “local living economies” (LLE).

Today, BALLE's vision has gone global, and it seeks to transform the world from the ground up, community by community. While working in North America,

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BALLE is spawning sister organizations on other continents and linking globally through fair trade economic exchange and as an international learning community.

At a deeper level, BALLE is changing mindsets from “every-man-for-himself” to an understanding that our security is based on community – that we must share, not hoard; and partner, not dominate. BALLE is creating a culture that values life over lifestyle and measures success not by continual material growth, but by growing our knowledge, consciousnesses and creativity, and deepening positive relationships among people within a healthy natural environment.

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Introduction to BALLE Networks

BALLE networks are as varied as the communities they serve, and are designed specifically to respond to needs of a particular community. Some networks start with one local living economy building block, such as sustainable agriculture, or kick off their efforts with a sustainable business conference, or a Think Local First campaign. Ultimately, the goal is to link efforts in various building blocks to transform your local economy and community.

Members of BALLE are autonomous local business networks committed to creating thriving local economies in their regions. Individual businesses do not join BALLE; rather, they join their local network, which is a member of BALLE.

These networks support one another with information, new resources, program ideas, and other connections. We continuously collect and share new ideas and initiatives, so the benefits of being a part of BALLE grow all the time!

There are currently over 80 BALLE networks in 30 U.S. states and Canadian provinces. The following list is current as of May 2010, but you can always find the latest list at www.livingeconomies.org/netview.

Alberta

- Province-wide - Live Local Alberta

Arizona

- Phoenix, Tucson and Statewide - Local First Arizona

Arkansas

- Greater Little Rock - Sustainable Business Network of Central Arkansas

British Columbia

- Victoria and Vancouver Island - Values-Based Business Network

California

- Berkeley - Buy Local Berkeley
- East Bay - Sustainable Business Alliance
- Los Angeles County - Green Business Networking
- McCloud Basin - McCloud Local First Network
- Oakland - Oakland Merchants Leadership Forum
- Santa Cruz County - Think Local First Santa Cruz County
- Sonoma County - Sonoma County GoLocal Cooperative
- Willits - Willits Chamber of Commerce

Colorado

- Denver - Mile High Business Alliance

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- Durango and La Plata County - Local First
- Fort Collins - Be Local Northern Colorado

Florida

- Tampa Bay - Sustainable Interconnected Business Alliance

Hawai'i

- Honolulu and Oahu - Sustain Hawai'i - Walk Story

Idaho

- Boise, Nampa and Statewide - Sustainable Community Connections of Idaho

Iowa

- Fairfield - Fairfield First!

Illinois

- Chicago's Andersonville neighborhood - Andersonville Chamber of Commerce / Andersonville Development Corporation
- Chicago - Local First Chicago
- Quincy - Live Local Quincy

Maine

- Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Kittery, Maine - Seacoast Buy Local

Maryland

- Annapolis - Annapolis Sustainable Business Alliance
- Baltimore & wider Chesapeake Bay Region - Chesapeake Sustainable Business Alliance

Massachusetts

- Greater Boston - Sustainable Business Network of Greater Boston
- Lower Cape Cod - Be Cape Cod
- Somerville - Somerville Local First
- Western Mass - Pioneer Valley Local First
- Worcester - Worcester Local First

Michigan

- Grand Rapids and Western Michigan - Local First
- Washtenaw County (Ann Arbor, Ypsilanti, Chelsea) - Think Local First

Montana

- Missoula - Sustainable Business Council

Nevada

- Reno and Sparks - LiveLocal Reno Sparks

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New Hampshire

- Portsmouth, New Hampshire, and Kittery, Maine - Seacoast Buy Local
- Upper Connecticut River Valley (Vermont & New Hampshire) - Local First Alliance

New Jersey

- Hunterdon County - Hunterdon First

New Mexico

- Las Cruces - Las Cruces Green Chamber of Commerce
- Santa Fe - Santa Fe Alliance
- Silver City and Southwest New Mexico (Grant, Luna, Hidalgo and Catron Counties) - Southwest New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce
- Statewide - New Mexico Green Chamber of Commerce

New York

- Capital District (Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, and Schenectady Counties) - Capital District Local First
- Buffalo - Buffalo First
- Ithaca - Local First Ithaca
- New York City - Sustainable Business Network of New York City

North Carolina

- Carrboro - Carrboro LocalMotive
- Greater Charlotte - Project for Innovation, Energy & Sustainability (PIES)
- Triad Region (Winston-Salem, Greensboro, High Point) - Buy Triad First

Nova Scotia

- Province-wide - BALLE Nova Scotia

Oregon

- Greater Portland - Sustainable Business Network of Greater Portland
- Southern Oregon Rogue Valley - The Rogue Initiative for a Vital Economy (THRIVE)

Pennsylvania

- Lancaster and York Counties - Susquehanna Sustainable Business Network
- Greater Philadelphia - Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia
- Southwest PA (Fayette, Greene, Washington, Westmoreland, and Somerset Counties) - Southwestern Pennsylvania Sustainable Economies Initiative

South Carolina

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- Charleston - Lowcountry Local First

United Kingdom

- Chapel Allerton, Leeds - Sustainable Economies Alliance

Vermont

- Statewide - Vermont Businesses for Social Responsibility
- Upper Connecticut River Valley (Vermont & New Hampshire) - Local First Alliance

Washington

- Bainbridge Island - Sustainable Bainbridge
- Bellingham and Northwest Washington - Sustainable Connections
- Jefferson County - Jefferson County BALLE
- Seattle - Seattle Good Business Network (formerly BALLE Seattle)
- Southwest Washington - Lower Columbia Alliance for Living Sustainably (LOCALS)
- Tacoma - Go Local Tacoma

Washington DC

- Washington DC - Think Local First DC

Wisconsin

- Madison and Dane County - Dane Buy Local
- Milwaukee - Our Milwaukee

Plus dozens more local networks currently in development!

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Envisioning Community Change: Local Living Economy Principles

Local Living Economy Principles

A Local Living Economy ensures that economic power resides locally to the greatest extent possible, sustaining vibrant, livable communities and healthy ecosystems in the process.

A Living Economy is guided by the following principles:

- Living economy communities produce and exchange locally as many products needed by their citizens as they reasonably can, while reaching out to other communities to trade fairly in those products they cannot reasonably produce at home. These communities value their unique character and encourage cultural exchange and cooperation.
- Living economy public policies support decentralized ownership of businesses and farms, fair wages, taxes, and budget allocations, trade policies benefiting local economies, and stewardship of the natural environment.
- Living economy citizens appreciate the benefits of buying from living economy businesses and, if necessary, are willing to pay a price premium to secure those personal and community benefits.
- Living economy investors value businesses that are community stewards and as such accept a "living return" on their financial investments rather than a maximum return, recognizing the value derived from enjoying a healthy and vibrant community and sustainable global economy.
- Living economy media provide sources of news independent of corporate control, so that citizens can make informed decisions in the best interests of their communities and natural environment.
- Living economy businesses are independent and primarily locally owned, and value the needs and interests of all stakeholders while building long-term profitability.

Living economy businesses strive to:

- Measure success by the triple bottom line of people and planet, as well as profits.

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- Source products from businesses with similar values, with a preference for local procurement.
- Provide employees a healthy workplace with meaningful living-wage jobs.
- Offer customers personal service and useful, safe, quality products.
- Work with suppliers to establish a fair exchange.
- Cooperate with other businesses in ways that balance their self-interest with their obligation to the community and future generations.
- Use their business practices to support an inclusive and healthy community, and to protect our natural environment.
- Yield a "living return" to owners and investors.

A Note from Author and BALLE Board Member David Korten

(Adapted from "Economies for Life," by David Korten, YES! Magazine, Fall 2002)

The primary purpose of a true market economy is not to make money for the rich and powerful. When Adam Smith conceptualized the idea of the market economy in his classic *The Wealth of Nations*, he had in mind economies that allocate human and material resources justly and sustainably to meet the self-defined needs of people and community.

When enterprises are locally rooted, human-scale, owned by stakeholders, and held accountable to the rule of law by democratically elected governments, there is a natural incentive for all concerned to take human and community needs and interests into account. When income and ownership are equitably distributed, justice is served and political democracy is strong. When needs are met locally by locally owned enterprises, people have greater control over their lives, money is recycled in the community rather than leaking off into the global financial casino, jobs are more secure, economies are more stable, and there are the means and the incentives to protect the environment and to build the relationships of mutual trust and responsibility that are the foundation of community.

Our quality of life would be stunningly different if we based economic decisions on life values rather than purely financial values – a natural choice if owners had to live with the non-financial consequences of their decisions.

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Full-cost pricing of energy, materials, and land use could expose the real inefficiencies of factory farming, conventional construction, and urban sprawl and make life-serving alternatives comparatively cost-effective.

Awakening majority

The ideal of a living economy might seem an impossible dream, except for the fact that so many of its elements are already in place. There are millions of for- and not-for-profit enterprises and public initiatives around the world aligned with the values and organizational principles of living economies. They include local independent businesses of all sorts, from bookstores to bakeries, community banks to independent media outlets. Indeed, independent, human-scale businesses are by far the majority of all businesses, provide most jobs, create nearly all new jobs, and are the source of most innovation.

So how do we get from a few million living enterprises that are struggling to survive at the fringes of the current global economy to a healthy planetary system of thriving living economies? The answer is, “We grow it into being.”

A system that no longer serves can be displaced only by a more powerful system. According to Margaret Wheatley, “This means that the work of change is to start over, to organize new local efforts, connect them to each other, and know that their values and practices can emerge as something even stronger.”

Making it happen

Those interested in helping to grow a living economy in their own community might start with a few simple questions. What do local people and businesses regularly buy that is or could be supplied locally by socially and environmentally responsible independent enterprises? Which existing local businesses are trying to practice living economy values? In what sectors are they clustered? Are there collaborative efforts aligned with living economy values already underway? The answers will point to promising opportunities.

Food is often a logical place to start. Everyone needs and cares about food, and food can be grown almost everywhere, is freshest and most wholesome when local, and is our most intimate connection to the land.

Countless local living economy initiatives are being launched all across North America and around the world. The greater the number and diversity of such initiatives, the more rapidly the web of an emergent planetary system of local living economies can grow, and the more readily each of us can redirect our life energy toward living economies in our shopping, employment, and investment choices. Through our individual and collective choices, we can grow into being the economic institutions, relationships, and culture of a just, sustainable, and compassionate world of living economies that work for all.

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Creating Community Change: Local Living Economy Building Blocks



Building Blocks Defined

As noted by BALLE co-founder and chair, Judy Wicks, “In order to build a local living economy, we must first determine what one looks like – what are the components, or building blocks, which comprise this sustainable system? By identifying the building blocks, we create a holistic vision of a local living economy that we can work toward achieving.”

BALLE networks connect the dots between the building blocks of a local living economy – sustainable local food systems, green building, energy efficiency and renewable energy, local zero waste manufacturing, community capital, and others – within the context of their local economies. These “building blocks” represent the basic pillars of most local economies.

Rather than choosing one sector within which to work, BALLE networks recognize that sustainable local communities and economies are based on the systemic relationship between these building blocks. We don’t prioritize or isolate the importance of energy efficiency from investing in local energy production, or ‘green’ buildings from the health of their occupants, or the viability of local farms from the prosperity of the grocers to whom they sell.

Many BALLE networks begin by building deep programs in one or more building blocks. Networks also have many cross-cutting initiatives that broadly

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support their general membership – such as member directories, Think Local First campaigns, and sustainable business education.

Why a Building Blocks Approach?

By organizing local networks around local living economy building blocks we are able to:

- Ensure each major segment of the economy is represented as we work to create community change,
- Help member business owners to self-organize around their passion and interest,
- Organize network events and programs cooperatively, with each building block contributing their expertise and knowledge to the benefit of the whole,
- Identify new business opportunities for increasing local self-reliance and sustainability within each building block, and
- Identify and understand how public policies support and promote the building blocks toward local self-reliance and sustainability.

What Constitutes a Local Living Economy Building Block?

The building blocks of your local living economy could include:

- Sustainable agriculture
- Renewable energy and energy efficiency
- Local zero-waste manufacturing
- Independent retail
- Green building
- Community capital
- Local and/or fair trade clothing
- Education
- Independent media and communications
- Business development/professional services
- Transportation
- Health and wellness
- Arts and culture
- *And others, as appropriate in your community.*

BALLE Core Building Blocks

What follows is a further explanation of BALLE's core building blocks including sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, local zero waste manufacturing, independent retail, green building, and community capital. Within each building block, BALLE networks support local businesses with continuous education,

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opportunities for connection, and an aim to increase public support for these businesses.

Sustainable Agriculture

A local food system is made up of many elements. It includes a region's farmers, ranchers, fishers, and food producers as well as the restaurants, retailers, and institutions that sell and serve food. It also includes the end consumer of those products – you – because local food is produced for local consumption.

Many BALLE networks are working to strengthen their local food systems, with programs connecting local farmers with local chefs and grocery managers, community-supported agriculture, food business and new farmer incubators, and other innovations.

BALLE network programs in sustainable agriculture have included:

- Trade meetings and producer/buyer directories
- Community-supported agriculture (CSA) programs
- Marketing campaigns, which may include “Certified Sustainable” or “Grown in (Your Region)” labels
- “Taste of (Your Region)” festivals and farm tours
- New farmer incubators and/or peer to peer apprenticeship programs
- “Chefs' collaborative” – connections between farmers and restaurants
- Farmers' markets or grocery stores supplied only with locally produced products

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency

North America relies heavily on fossil fuels – coal, oil, and natural gas – to power its homes and businesses. Fossil fuels are nonrenewable, meaning they draw on finite resources that will eventually become too expensive or too environmentally damaging to retrieve. In contrast, energy resources such as wind and solar energy will never run out.

Many BALLE networks have started or nurtured renewable energy cooperatives and companies as a way of fostering more community control of essential energy supplies. The idea of community-based energy production is also gaining a following in many BALLE communities.

BALLE network programs in renewable energy have included:

- Development of local climate action plans to reduce greenhouse gasses
- Community green power or energy efficiency challenges
- Community-produced and community-owned power
- Green jobs training corps and new partnerships with technical colleges

What: About BALLE and Our Networks

Local Zero-Waste Manufacturing

The growing international 'zero waste' movement imagines a future where everything is a renewable resource, and where industrial practices meet societal needs without damaging and depleting the planet's natural systems on which our future depends.

Notes Dr. Bill Sheehan, a Fellow at the Post Carbon Institute, "High levels of energy and materials consumption in industrial countries are the driving force behind the decline in virtually all major life support systems on [the planet]. Of all the materials used in products, only 1 percent is used in products 'durable' enough to still be in use six months later, according to industrial ecologist Robert Ayres."

In response, the zero waste movement calls for a 'whole system' approach to resource management that maximizes recycling, minimizes waste, reduces consumption and ensures that products are made to be reused, repaired or recycled back into nature or the marketplace. Sheehan calls this "radical resource efficiency and eliminating rather than managing waste." Jeffrey Hollender, President of Seventh Generation, calls zero waste "the mother of environmental no-brainers."

BALLE network programs in local, zero-waste manufacturing have included:

- Education and mentoring around industrial ecology and bio-mimicry
- Aggregated demand for materials sourcing and distribution
- Sustainable manufacturers summits

Independent Retail

A growing number of studies demonstrate that supporting independent businesses has positive benefits for a community's economy, cultural heritage, civic engagement, and environmental well-being. We described a range of these studies above in our section on "Why Local Ownership Matters."

While retail is only about 7 percent of the U.S. economy, a healthy independent retail sector has an undeniably large impact on a community's unique sense of place. Independent retailers are important, highly visible and influential partners in the movement toward local living economies.

BALLE network programs in independent retail have included:

- Think Local First programs
- Coupon books and buying cards
- Partnering with local government to create "character only" independent retail zones
- Directories and neighborhood business maps

What: About BALLE and Our Networks

Green Building

Green building aims to reduce the negative impacts of our built environment on the planet. It takes into account every stage of a building's lifespan, beginning with the sourcing of materials for construction and keeping in mind reusability at the end of a building's life. Green building incorporates recovered or recycled materials, and materials that do not contain the toxic chemicals found in many conventional building materials. This leads to a healthier indoor environment, as do natural lighting and ventilation.

Compared to conventional buildings, many green buildings produce significantly less CO₂, waste, and other pollution. Green building innovations range from the practical to the inspirational, and these BALLE network members have taken the plunge and brought some of these innovations home.

BALLE network programs in green building have included:

- Green building associations
- Model/showcase building and landscape tours
- Land trusts for affordable housing
- Partnerships with local government to reduce barriers and build incentives for a healthier built environment

Community Capital

Locally owned, small businesses constitute about one half of the private U.S. economy in terms of output and jobs, but they receive almost no investment from the nation's pension funds or from mutual, hedge, venture, or any other kind of investment funds. Nor are locally owned businesses common beneficiaries of the billions of public dollars spent each year on economic development incentives and subsidy programs at the federal and state level.

According to Michael Shuman, "In a well-functioning financial system, roughly one-half of the investment should go to roughly one-half of the economy. Today, every American, even stalwart advocates of community development, are overinvesting in the Fortune 500 companies and underinvesting in local businesses key to local vitality. This is a colossal market failure."

BALLE networks are working to correct these market failures by creating new and better opportunities for community residents and business owners alike to financially support locally owned enterprise.

BALLE network programs in community capital have included:

- Local currency tools
- Peer investment clubs
- Connecting socially responsible lenders with innovative member businesses

What: About BALLE and Our Networks

Examples from the Field: **A Few BALLE Network Highlights**

Sustainable communities: In Bellingham, Washington, **Sustainable Connections** has transformed the purchasing behavior of 3 in 5 households to “Think Local First,” and accelerated the community’s move toward sustainable agriculture, renewable energy, and green building such that in 2009, the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) named Bellingham the nation’s number one small city for urban progress toward sustainability.

Business training: Philadelphia’s **Sustainable Business Network** holds regular Social Venture Institutes, which train a hundred entrepreneurs annually in business practices measured by a triple bottom line of people, planet, and profit. In addition, their pioneering work has led to Philadelphia being recognized as a national leader in green jobs.

Economic justice: Washington, DC’s Latino Economic Development Corporation founded **Think Local First DC**, and **Local First Wheaton**. 80 percent of the business members of the Wheaton, Maryland-based BALLE network are entrepreneurs of color.

Public policy: Several BALLE networks have commissioned landmark studies paving the way for better public policy to foster sustainable economic development, including the **San Francisco Locally Owned Merchants Alliance**, whose study found that a modest shift in consumer purchasing behavior – diverting just 10% of purchases from national chain stores to locally owned businesses – would annually create 1,300 new jobs and yield nearly \$200 million in incremental economic activity in the city.

Sustainable agriculture: Many BALLE networks, such as Southern Oregon's **The Rogue Initiative for a Vital Economy (THRIVE)**, put on Eat Local Week festivities each year in September. THRIVE's packed week culminates in a food and farm tour that introduces Rogue Valley residents to their local farmers.



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Supporting Your Work: BALLE Dues and Network Services

BALLE's mission is to catalyze, strengthen and connect networks of locally owned independent businesses dedicated to building strong local living economies. Our services are designed to guide networks of innovative local entrepreneurs through various stages of development, to synthesize and communicate the best network development ideas and practices, and to build the larger movement for local living economies.

BALLE annual membership dues are \$500. Available to all BALLE member networks, our current suite of services includes:

BALLE Basics Orientation Sessions

www.livingeconomies.org/events

For people interested in launching a new BALLE network -- or for new staff and board members of existing networks -- we offer free conference-call orientation sessions each month on the basics of network start-up. We discuss local living economy principles, BALLE services and network benefits, and the network application and intake process.

BALLE Conference & Discounted Admission

www.livingeconomies.org/conference

Our annual BALLE Business Conference brings together hundreds of business owners, entrepreneurs, economic development professionals, network leaders, and community leaders to share replicable, applicable initiatives emerging from the grassroots for building local living economies. Come connect, share, and be inspired by the entrepreneurs building the business models we need for local food systems, community capital, local living economy manufacturing, green building, and energy efficiency. Learn from the thought leaders designing community wealth-building strategies, cooperative ownership solutions, and the policies for sustainable economic development and thinking local first.

BALLE Training Workshops

www.livingeconomies.org/workshops

Our new workshop series, Building a Local BALLE Network, brings experienced BALLE leaders to your community for a day of intensive training on network and program development. Intended for existing and new networks, these workshops are appropriate for local business, government, and community representatives. You'll leave equipped with key principles, tools and relationships for building business and community innovation through the building blocks of a local living economy.

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Peer Consulting with Regional Network Hubs

www.livingeconomies.org/hub-networks

Through the BALLE Hubs, networks have ongoing access to phone and email consulting on a wide range of organizational and program development issues. Hub Networks will also host regional network gatherings, perform at least one training workshop a year, and will work with BALLE staff to assist potential new networks and interested communities.

Regional Gatherings & Regional Connectivity Calls

www.livingeconomies.org/gatherings

BALLE staff and Regional Network Hubs host periodic, in-person regional gatherings to promote deeper networking and peer support. For more information, see our regional gatherings page. Gatherings are also advertised on the events section of our website and via email. In addition, we will lead periodic regional phone calls to help build peer relationships, facilitate idea-sharing and leverage regional events, speakers and policy change. These calls are publicized to BALLE member networks via email.

Community of Practice Immersion Program

www.livingeconomies.org/immersion-program

The BALLE “Community of Practice Immersion,” or CoP, is a new annual, cohort-based program for linking and strengthening the pioneering BALLE network leaders who are creating the local living economies movement. Learning will take place through 4-6 in-person immersion retreats a year, and will use a combination of sharing between peer members and input from world-class experts. BALLE network directors are invited to apply starting in May 2010 and immersion retreats will start in November 2010. Approximately 10 participants will be selected each year.

Local Economic Development Encyclopedia, Leakage Calculators, and Workbook

Our new suite of local economic development and public policy tools includes an online encyclopedia of current issues, successful examples, and helpful resources; three online leakage calculators (released from May through December of this year), and a forthcoming community training workbook. All tools have been developed by author, economist and BALLE research director Michael Shuman along with a committee of economic development experts from across North America.

BALLE Roundup Calls

www.livingeconomies.org/events

These lively monthly calls for network leaders feature presentations and discussions on topics of interest at both the regional and national levels, and feature expert speakers and network leaders themselves. Calls are held the second Tuesday of each month and are open to representatives of BALLE

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networks, including network staff, board members, and key business members. See our events page for the calendar of upcoming calls and topics.

BALLE Guides

Email us to place an order: info@livingeconomies.org

With our network partners, BALLE co-publishes How-To Guides for sustainable local economic development. BALLE Guides provide easy-to-use advice and case studies for networks that want to expand their programming and accelerate their impact. Most of these guides are free for member networks, and cost \$100 for a printed copy for non-members.

Current guides include:

How to Build a BALLE Network [NEW, available later this fall]

Written by BALLE Executive Director Michelle Long and the staff of Sustainable Connections, this 200-page manual is loaded with resources and templates based on the work of networks throughout North America.

Think Local First [available now; updated version available this fall]

The proven how-to manual for organizing, incorporating, funding, and sustaining a Local First campaign, often a community's first step on the path to a Living Economy.

Community Food Enterprise [available now in hard copy and at www.communityfoodenterprise.org]

Developed by Michael Shuman and Alissa Barron, in partnership with the Wallace Center at Winrock International, this report chronicles the social, environmental and financial performance of 24 locally owned food enterprises including producers, processors, grocers, restaurants, training programs and other food-related businesses from the Americas, Africa, Asia and Eastern Europe.

Green Jobs Toolkit [NEW, available June 2010]

Written by Leanne Krueger-Braneky and staff, and based on the successful efforts of the Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia, this guide is a must read for anyone interested in incubating green jobs within locally owned businesses and creating local policy change that supports green collar work. This manual will be available in hard copy at a reduced fee for current BALLE members.

Food and Fuels Toolkit [NEW, available early 2011]

Written by Vicki Pozzebon and staff, and based on the successful efforts of the Santa Fe Alliance, this guide is a must read for anyone working to rebuild local food systems, to create local, renewable energy sources, and to connect these two building blocks through integrated work.

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Members Website

www.livingeconomies.org/user (requires member network login)

The Members Website was created for the staff, board members and all those involved in supporting the success of local BALLE networks. It includes a large document library and an encyclopedia of network development resources, all regularly updated by BALLE staff and network leaders. Here you'll find detailed information on how to develop an effective organization, numerous program ideas, contact information for other network leaders, an archive of newsletters and Network Leader Roundup Call notes, and much more.

Local First Campaigns

www.livingeconomies.org/local-first

“Think Local First” is a term developed and trademarked by BALLE networks to refer to our commitment to our communities. Rather than simply promoting “buying” local, we are suggesting our larger role as stewards. A Local First campaign educates consumers and businesses about the economic, social and often environmental advantages that independent, local businesses bring to a community. Resources include a How-To Guide, program samples from dozens of communities, one or more Roundup Calls featuring Local First innovations, and an annual Buy Local Week.

Helping You Tell Your Story

With media outreach, (mainstream and social media), a video library, and regular articles written by national thought leaders in response to your most frequently asked questions, we support you in communicating the impacts and benefits of local living economies and the importance of supporting your work.

BALLE Bureau

www.livingeconomies.org/speakers-bureau

BALLE staff and board members speak weekly at most of the nation’s leading conferences for socially responsible investing, business, and economic development. The BALLE’s Speakers’ Bureau is a Who’s Who of Living Economy rock stars who are available to be retained for your community. BALLE’s line-up will inspire, provoke, and incite any audience, and represent a perfect way to kick off or celebrate any living economy campaign.

BALLE Buzz Newsletter

www.livingeconomies.org/get-involved

Our bi-monthly e-newsletter is packed with program ideas from peer communities, case studies of local living economy businesses, guest essays, and overviews of new resources and tools to support your work.

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Getting Started in Your Community: Ten Steps to Starting a Network

We recommend that leaders interested in forming a BALLE network consider the following steps. These were created by our network in Bellingham, Washington, Sustainable Connections, to capture the start-up experience of some of our oldest and largest networks.

These steps are not meant to be prescriptive or necessarily a linear process. Each community and organization should decide which of these steps are useful, come up with their own different steps, and use the following as 'touchstone' guidelines rather than as a magic formula.

For communities that do decide to form BALLE networks, once you join, you'll receive much more detailed suggestions for each of the steps below in our manual, [How to Build a Community Network of Independent Businesses](#).

We encourage communities to apply for BALLE network status at whatever point in the suggested process below (or whatever process you design for yourself) makes the most sense to you, with an eye toward our basic qualifications as noted in the following section, Getting Started with BALLE: Application Process for New Networks.

You can also find further suggestions for starting a network, as well as examples of current BALLE network activities, on our website, www.livingeconomies.org.

1. Assess your community and yourself.

Decide: 1) if you need a new community business network focused on green jobs, sustainable industries, and thinking local first; and 2) if a business network is the solution that speaks best to you.

Assessing your community

Analyze whether you need to create an organization or whether an existing group already is effectively working toward these strategies and could just use your support and ideas. If there is a strong existing community business network making progress toward these ideas in your community, they can join BALLE and get access to a national peer network and idea exchange. You might just need to steer your local group in that direction.

If you do think there is a need to start something new, you need to assess whether you have the support and potential to develop a strong steering committee of local business and government leaders.

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The basic point here is that you don't want to re-create the wheel, and you do want to be sure that this effort has been or could be adopted by a core group of leadership businesses in your community.

Assessing yourself

It is also important for you, the reader of this manual and potential organizer of a new community business network, to be clear whether this “solution” meets your needs. This might be completely interesting to you, but as Mark Twain said, “When you're a hammer, everything looks like a nail.” Forming an effective new community business network is not at all easy, and there are many other strategies to achieve sustainability projects in your community.

We encourage you now to assess yourself and whether the community business network model is a fit for you. If it is, go forward boldly! If it is not a fit for you, that is a good thing to know, too – the world needs your work, whatever it is.

[Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:](#)

A detailed self-assessment for determining if our model is right for your skills and perspective.

2. Find the right champions: values-aligned owners of local, independently owned businesses.

Make a target list

Effectively building a new community network of businesses focused on transforming your local economy toward green jobs, sustainable industries and buying local first, requires building a core group of business “champions” who share this vision. This is critical. Local business people trust and respect other local business people. As you begin to invite others to join your organization, everyone will want to know who else is involved. They are also the ones who will know whether the programs and services you are developing, are indeed of benefit to local businesses!

To find these champions, make a list of all the business owners you know who would meet these three criteria:

- respected by other business people and the community at large,
- values-aligned with this vision, and
- “can-do” (positive attitude).

If you only know one or two local business owners who you think fit all these categories, that's okay, start there.

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Schedule some one-on-one coffee meetings with your targets

Your goal at these meetings is to tap into these business owner's personal goals for your community and their hopes for all of our futures, and to help them see how a new community business network could help you to get there.

At your meeting tell them why you selected them (the three criteria above), as well as how much you respect their opinions. Present this manual and examples from other new community business networks. Explain that other communities have come together to strengthen their communities, and create more and better jobs that also creatively address environmental challenges. Share the results from some of these other communities, and ask them whether they would be interested in a local business membership organization that:

- provides an opportunity for values-aligned business owners to connect, learn from each other and do business together,
- provides education and new ideas that would keep them at the forefront of the move toward sustainability and the future of business, and
- is effective at swaying public purchasing behavior toward these locally owned businesses that are committed to innovating and stewarding your community.

Then, let them talk! Also ask them for the names of other local business owners they think also fit the three criteria and find out if you can either get an introduction or even better, whether you could approach these other business owners together.

Meeting as a small group

Once you have 5-7 interested business owners, schedule a small 'working group' meeting at a time when they all can come. Consider meeting at someone's home for collegial conversation. Have everyone start by introducing themselves, their business, and why they were attracted to this idea and this meeting. Be prepared with an agenda so people feel the meeting is a good use of their time, but don't be rigid if the conversation wants to go other places. Let the energy spark where it's natural.

Have a discussion that allows everyone's vision to come together. A successful conclusion might be a commitment to meet again to talk about some of the next steps. After the meeting, send minutes of the decisions made back out to the attendees, thank them for their time, and remind them of the next meeting time and place. (The point, of course, is to make it really simple to participate.)

[Our "How to Build a Network" Manual further explains:](#)

Detailed suggestions for your planning and carrying out your first small group meeting.

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3. **Decide what, where and who. Decide on geographic scope and membership criteria of your organization.**

While your “working group” is still very small (10 or less people), get clarity from within the core before inviting others to join you. Your initial group should be tightly values-aligned because they were hand selected as can-do, positive and well-respected business owners that have a shared vision and commitment to transforming the local economy and community toward green jobs, sustainable industries, and thinking local first. Make some key decisions with this group about what, where and who you aim to be before expanding to more people.

If you have decided to be a business membership network, you need to decide your membership criteria and geographic scope. For example, Sustainable Connections decided to offer three kinds of membership to ensure everyone who wanted to could be involved in some way. They decided to offer “Business Memberships” to any local, independently owned business with local ownership, full autonomy to make any decisions for their business, and a commitment to strong community, healthy environment, meaningful employment and buying local first. They offer “Affiliate Business Memberships” to managers or owners of non-independently controlled businesses that operate in our community. And they offer “Supporter Memberships” to citizens who care about what we do and want to follow the organization through its announcements and newsletters. Finally, they offer non-profit organizations a 20% discount, and also offer discounts to members from our surrounding counties who want to participate even though Sustainable Connection’s programs, events and promotions occur only in their local county.

[Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:](#)

Suggestions for determining local and independent ownership of a given business, network membership levels and sustainability criteria for business members.

4. **Create an early steering committee and action teams.**

Start meeting more regularly to orient yourselves to the topics, possibilities and each other

By now your early working group will have come to some key agreement about what you are trying to do, where, and with whom. You have likely done some surveying of the business community that has boosted your evidence that there is local interest. It’s time to invite an official “steering committee” to get this organization launched!

This should be a group that is willing to commit itself to a year of part-time volunteer service to get the organization launched. A steering committee still

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isn't a legal entity, and it won't necessarily be the same group that later becomes your board of directors when you file for some sort of 501(c) status, (though it could be).

A common question is “We know our steering committee should be made up of local business owners but they are so busy. Should we include interested citizens?” This is a delicate balancing act. Business owners are busy and you need significant volunteer energy to build a local living economy business network in your region. However, building a business network requires businesses to lead the way. Business owners see great benefit in participating in a network with other business owners who share their challenges. Students, activists, and other concerned citizens do not face the same challenges as business owners who are committed to using their organizations as vehicles for change while still making payroll.

Therefore, you might consider including a few committed individuals, maybe even a lead coordinator who is not currently running a business but has time, energy and passion for your mission, as long as the majority of your steering committee are seasoned business owners.

Form action teams

You will quickly need to break into sub-committees to accomplish your objectives. These groups can meet between steering committee meetings and report on their research when the full group convenes. Be aware that joining a “committee” can instill a fear of “every Tuesday, 8 am, for the rest of my life.....” So be clear about the committee’s objectives – what plans do you need them to implement, and upon completion, can the committee disband? You might consider calling them Action Teams.

Though you may have other needs or ideas, typically these four action teams are useful in the early days: membership & communications, programs, infrastructure and the launch event.

[Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:](#)

Tips on effectively serving your steering committee, effective leadership and coordination roles, and specific organizing suggestions for the four action teams outlined above. Also includes a draft interview for potential new members.

5. Draft mission, vision and membership benefits

Your steering committee needs to agree on what your organization will do in the world, and what benefits you aim to provide future members and the community at large. These decisions will set the tone of your organization, for your launch, and will guide your next steps. The ‘member benefits’ you decide to offer will, in essence, be your early work plan!

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The following framework is a useful tool to develop your “case statement”.

- What are our aspirations for our community (vision)?
- Toward those aspirations, what work do we do? Or in other words, what are we “in the business” of doing at this organization (mission)?
- Who is our customer?
- What does the customer want and need?
- With what services do we respond?
- What is the value of our work to our customer and to the community at large?
- What resources do we need (and how do we secure them)?
- What is the cost to the community if these services are not provided adequately?

Before you can sign up members, you need to get to clarity about the above questions. We recommend developing a brochure, website, dues structure and plan for delivering on member benefits before your launch event. Start registering members at your launch event.

[Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:](#)

Sample launch materials, along with a chapter on building network membership including tips for recruiting members and sample membership dues and benefits.

[Our Members Website contains:](#)

Examples and templates for brochures, websites, dues structure, work plans and additional resources from other BALLE networks.

6. Build a work plan that can deliver early wins. It should support businesses in stewarding community and the community in buying local first.

Develop a work plan that includes your vision, mission, and a set of goals, both long- and short-term. Don't overwhelm your first year's work plan with too many projects. Instead, prioritize your activities by choosing projects that are easy to accomplish as well as those that can have visible impact while you are building capacity.

It is very important – both for the psyche of the steering committee (energy and action attracts more energy and action) and for building trust in your community – that you

An example of a potential early win:
Studies have shown that people who identify themselves as independent book store fans still only do a minority of their shopping there. They might choose a non-local online bookseller or a bookstore chain at the airport for a majority of their purchases. Increasing the percentage of time these shoppers thoughtfully choose “locals” instead, is much easier than getting people who have never stepped into an independent book store to switch.

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concentrate on early wins and successes. This will pave the way for deeper work later. Pick projects that you know you can accomplish and look for low hanging fruit, such as opportunities to “go through open windows....rather than through brick walls.”

Sustainable Connections reports that starting from day one with a strategy of “reciprocity” was critical to their success. Early on, Sustainable Connections communicated twin goals of supporting local businesses in their stewardship and healthy economy innovation and, in turn, asking the community to support local businesses first. This set up a tone of mutual responsibility. Everyone needed to do their part and everyone was in it together. Sustainable Connections didn’t ask the community to support their local businesses just because they existed. They also did not ask their local businesses to support an unreceptive community. (For example, we often see organizations asking local businesses for donations or to sponsor events, only to find the organization buys their event supplies at a non-local business.)

We also recommend you be clear from the outset about your longer term goals as organization. Do you hope to have just one campaign and do it well, or are you interested in broader issues of community and sustainability? Knowing upfront what your strategy is, and that you will be adding programs that support this approach over time, can ensure your organization has a never-ending set of opportunities, and ensure members aren’t caught off guard about your intentions.

Finally, it’s worth noting that some networks have organized *only* around the idea of supporting local businesses first. While Local First campaigns are often a critically important component of a BALLE network’s efforts, focusing exclusively and only on Local First creates a different kind of organization: more of a trade alliance or a local marketing campaign that is more limited in scope than a true local living economies business network. Such organizations can also get push-back from member businesses if they decide later they are interested in broader issues of “sustainability.” Additionally, we have seen that having only issue, or one campaign, limits the opportunity for the network to remain vibrant and viable over time.

[Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:](#)

Example work plan elements for year one for a range of suggested action teams.

7. Add a little organizational structure.

Organizational Infrastructure

Early on, you’ll need to name your organization, and then incorporate with your state’s “Secretary of State” offices, even if you will be a non-profit

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corporation. It is a simple application and a fee in the range of \$30. You'll need to select an address or set up a post office box, choose a contact person for phone communications, and set up a basic website. You can always use one of many free templates that are out there and transfer your content to a more robust and professional website once you have the resources. Open a bank account in the name of the organization so you can accept event fees, and pay for simple expenses like printing and food. Your organization can propose and perform contract work for government or other organizations and you can collect membership dues and events income without becoming a non-profit organization.

You also will need to start thinking about whether 501(c)(3), (c)(4), or (c)(6) designation is the appropriate legal designation for your organization:

- If you intend to be heavily engaged in advocating for policy shifts with local and state governments, then a **501(c)(4)** designation is appropriate.
- Generally, organizations that focus primarily on promoting local businesses are considered **501(c)(6)** organizations by the IRS. The IRS sees these organizations as similar to a trade group or chamber of commerce with a primary purpose being to support members.
- Becoming a **501(c)(3)** non-profit that can accept tax-deductible donations and foundation grants requires you to have an education focus that is wider than promoting members. If you intend to spend the majority of your work on transforming your hometown's economy toward greater environmental, economic and community sustainability – including supporting businesses with innovative transition, and in educating the public about these issues – a 501(c)(3) may be right for your network.

Once you are more established, and have determined which organizational model will work best for you, you will need to contact the appropriate city and state agencies. If you decide to become a non-profit organization, get an application from www.irs.gov to obtain tax-exempt status.

Staffing

Most networks start with a volunteer steering committee and a strong volunteer coordinator, all working from home. Action teams are generally headed by volunteers from the steering committee, who list their personal contact information on the network's new website or collateral materials.

Some networks have started with a group of volunteers and a paid coordinator. In these cases one business might provide a desk, phone and computer in their office. One business might generously agree to make a significant gift to this work by providing a part-time or full-time paycheck for this coordinator, or a group of businesses might collaborate toward paid coordination assistance.

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In either case, birthing a new organization requires entrepreneurial energy. Be sure your committee is made up of both managerial and entrepreneurial experience. Your lead “coordinator” should be a natural sales person who attracts others and is comfortable with/excited about the notion of creating new programs and publications from scratch. Your next likely and needed staff support will be administrative assistance.

[Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:](#)

Suggestions for organizational development, including detailed chapters on governance (by-laws, policy decisions and resolutions, board roles and responsibilities, and board committees) and partnerships (example partnerships and partnership proposals).

8. Identify your opportunities - then draft a budget and fund-raising plan that corresponds with your plans.

How do we start? We have no funding

It’s worth noting that very few new efforts have funding before they start. The business members of your steering committee can likely all tell their start-up story – including how they were creative, looked for opportunity and worked hard.

Funding is nothing compared to enthusiasm from a team, and an enormous amount can get accomplished by volunteers who enjoy each other’s company and feel a burning mission. For example, Sustainable Connections started with no money, no staff, no bank account, and no assets -- except great people! Eight years later the organization has nearly a million dollar budget.

Early on, admission fees for your events, film showings, and gatherings should bring in money to cover their costs and hard expenses like printed organizational materials. Steering committee members can chip in for meeting snacks, BALLE membership dues and “101” trainings, and other early expenses.

Eventually you will have specific projects that require funding, but a lack of funding shouldn’t slow down the start of your network.

Draft a budget and build a revenue plan that corresponds with your work plan

At this stage, you will have some ideas of what your network wants to do and the pace at which you want to do it. Some networks start with a group of busy business people, all of whom are volunteers, and none of whom is the lead coordinator. These networks may spend a year of fun getting to know each other while deciding their vision and goals and programs and

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services, and creating their collateral materials. Other networks have more ambitious goals and a dedicated coordinator.

An amazing amount of progress can be made with a few thousand dollars, some examples provided by peer BALLE networks, and committed steering committee members. With significant volunteer time (15 hours a month from each steering committee member and a highly effective volunteer coordinator able to work half-time on organizing efforts), it is an achievable goal to aim for enough program deliverables and connected funding to cover at least part-time paid staff time within six to twelve months from your first meeting.

Strong organizations have a diversity of funding sources. These could include local government, business sponsorships, membership, individual fund raising and/or fundraising events, earned income (events, etc.), and foundation donations. When you start to think about funding sources, don't think, "Who will give us money?," think "Who else will benefit if this work is successful?" Those are your likely supporters.

Your first funding sources will not likely be foundations (although some community foundations prove to be exceptions). Most foundations don't support new organizations in getting off the ground. Most likely your first support will be from your steering committee members who themselves can become Founding or Sustaining Members of the organization at \$1,000 per year and receive additional benefits such as promotion and public thanks at all your public forums and workshops, and on your printed and web materials. Now is also the time to visit those stakeholders you contacted early on in your organizing process with interviews. Your steering committee can present your work plan for the year and all the impacts you are going to make happen, and ask them to join with their own support to ensure these deliverables happen in your community!

If you have put together a calendar of events, consider asking an underwriter to support your efforts at \$5,000 per quarter. Your city or county government may be supportive. Consider themes for your events each quarter of the year and consider a match for that theme, such as food-related business sponsors for local food systems or construction trades-related businesses for a quarter on issues related to green building.

As you work on your budget, and test it with reality, you will likely go back and forth between your "expense budget" desires, and your most likely and realistic "revenue budget". The goal is to figure out how to combine them and make them balance.

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Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:

Fundraising and budgeting tips, including example annual budgets, tips about income and expenses, common revenue opportunities, program and earned revenue, business sponsorships, grants, government contracts, and individual donations.

9. Launch! Host a coming out event ...and recruit members.

Your launch event – the official coming out party for your new network – is a very important night! A good time for your official launch event is six to twelve months after you have started your “First Friday” gatherings. You will have been interviewing businesses, meeting with stakeholders, building a plan and have some great new friendships. There should be a “buzz” about what’s coming by the time you launch!

This launch event will have served as a motivating deadline for your steering committee and so you will all be there, smiley and ready to answer questions about what your organization is and will be doing, and why it is important to join as a member. You will have your membership collateral materials, and should be ready to sign people up on the spot. In fact, consider two prices for admission to the event, such as \$5 for members and \$15 for non-members (to encourage member sign-ups).

As usual, the people who attend the event will be the most important predictor of the evening’s success. You should reach out to the press and community in advance so that local newspapers, business newsletters, and Facebook pages are all promoting the event. You need to have carefully created an extensive invitation list, and all work hard to be sure your invitees attend. Give significant notice, deliver plenty of personal invitations, make personal calls, and re-confirm by saying, “So we’re expecting to see you there and we’re really looking forward to that!” Make sure you have invited elected officials, community business leaders, potential partners, and other influential members of the community.

You will want the décor, food, music, photos, and activities to all emphasize a sense of place. Aim to highlight what people in your community love about what’s “100% uniquely your hometown”, with a goal of making people feel special. You will want a festive atmosphere – music that makes people smile, good local food, there could be comedy or a gospel choir – whatever you think best helps embody the energy of your plans!

Regarding the evening’s program, your goal is to build momentum that can propel you forward for the next phase of your work!

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Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:

Suggestions for your launch event program, as well as a detailed chapter on communicating about your organization, including suggestions for key messages, tone, 10 frequently asked questions about community networks of independent businesses, a sample Top 10 Reasons to Think Local – Buy Local – Be Local, and recommended communications strategies like community-based social marketing.

10. Stay fresh, energetic and don't let the momentum slow.

You have launched! Now it's your job to maintain this momentum, recruit members, and roll out quality projects with professionalism. Even if at first, few believe you will succeed, public support will change as you successfully and visibly demonstrate your ability to complete projects well.

In the early days, choose small projects that you can do well and that will help to demonstrate that your organization can get things done. Concentrate on quality projects over quantity. Avoid poor design, and “cut and paste” efforts. As public confidence grows in your network and participants' understanding of your vision becomes more sophisticated, you will be paving the way for more complex and ambitious projects.

The following initiatives have been shown to be great first programs for any network:

- Events: monthly networking alternating with sustainability education
- A membership directory
- A stewardship program or challenge
- A Think Local First campaign
- A first initiative in an industry program

Our “How to Build a Network” Manual further explains:

Detailed suggestions for each of the following programs mentioned above, as well as a “Take Action” chapter with tips and templates for industry programs as well as community challenges and campaigns.

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Getting Started with BALLE: Application Process for New Networks

In our experience, communities become interested in applying for BALLE network status in a variety of different ways.

Some communities approach BALLE very early in the local planning process, hoping to use BALLE's collective expertise to help determine how to bring local businesses together. Other communities approach BALLE after a community network has already been formed,

The initial organizational structure of BALLE networks also differs by community, based on the assets, resources and goals of that community. For example, many networks start as informal partnership of local businesses, and eventually morph into new non-profits that staff and coordinate network initiatives and support member businesses. Other communities develop a formal organizational home for their network before they approach BALLE. Yet other networks are incubated by existing organizations, often non-profits, with missions that resonate with BALLE's approach.

Our Goals for the Application Process

There's no one right way – or moment in time – to become a BALLE network. If you're interested in exploring BALLE network affiliation, please contact us.

Our objectives are to help you ensure you've got a clear vision and plan for *your* community, to bring you into the national BALLE community, and to start linking you to tools, services and peers who can support your local goals.

Given the diversity of experience across BALLE communities, our application process is designed to address to two simultaneous goals:

- **First, we'd like help you understand BALLE**, including our approach, our services, and our network of networks.
- **At the same time, we'd like to understand you**, including your goals, plans, status, local membership (or future planned members), and community context.

To this end, we provide several resources – described on the next page – to step us all through the process of mutual information-sharing and evaluation.

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The Four-Step Application Process

Once an organization has expressed an interest in learning more about becoming a BALLE network, we take the following steps:

- **First**, we send you this [New Network Information Kit](#), along with our network [application form](#). Please review this information, and come prepared to ask specific questions during our BALLE Basics call, described below.
- **Second**, we invite you to our next [BALLE Basics orientation call](#) for potential new networks. Designed to supplement our information kit, this call will be led by BALLE staff and will provide you with an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to hear the questions of other communities looking to become BALLE networks.
- **Third**, [we invite you to follow up with BALLE staff](#) if you have further questions or need additional resources.
- **Finally**, should you decide to apply, we schedule an intake phone call to review your application together!

We also welcome applications earlier in the process (such as before the BALLE Basics call), but in that case, we encourage you to review our *New Network Information Kit* thoroughly and refer to the minimum qualifications below.

Our application process is truly as easy as that! It's the local work of visioning, planning, and relationship building that takes time.

A Note on Minimum Qualifications

As we noted in our Introduction to BALLE Networks, individual businesses and individual community members do not join BALLE; rather, they form (or join) a local network, which is a member of BALLE.

While we encourage interested individual businesses to contact BALLE, we cannot process applications which do not meet the following minimum criteria as captured in the formal application:

- A **specific geographic area of focus**, such as a city or town, a portion of a city or town, or a county.
- The creation of a network **steering committee** – your committee can be large or small, and organized in different ways, but it should include (and describe) at least eight people (with five or more being business

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owners) who are serious about creating a local BALLE network and membership.

- An **initial vision/mission** – depending on your current planning status and level of membership, this may change over time, and we understand that. But before we get started with you, we'd like to understand your initial thinking about why a BALLE network is needed and the unique value your network will bring to your community.
- An **initial plan** – though this can still be rough and need not be pages long, we'd like an initial understanding of your current plans, how these plans are connected to BALLE's principles, what building blocks your network is interested in supporting, and how you plan to grow your network.

Our application form prompts you for answers to the above questions (criteria), along with a handful of additional questions.

PLEASE NOTE: If you are interested in creating a BALLE network but don't currently meet these minimum qualifications, we still encourage you to be in touch so we can suggest processes and/or contacts for getting to this minimum initial stage.

We've provided the previous section, *Getting Started in Your Community: Ten Steps to Starting a Network*, to further assist with your initial planning processes.



Who:

BALLE Staff & Board

Who: BALLE Staff and Board

The People Behind BALLE

For full biographies of all staff, board, and trustees, please see our website at www.livingeconomies.org.

Staff

Michelle Long, Executive Director
Based in our Bellingham, WA headquarters office

Alissa Barron, Network Services Director
Based in our eastern regional staff office in the Washington, DC area

Michael Shuman, Research & Economic Development Director
Based in our eastern regional staff office in the Washington, DC area

Christine Ageton, Community of Practice Manager
Based in our Bellingham, WA headquarters office

Justine Ketola, Events Manager
Based in our Bellingham, WA headquarters office

Alie Walker, Administrative Coordinator
Based in our Bellingham, WA headquarters office

Board of Directors

Judy Wicks, co-founder and chair emeritus, BALLE; founder, White Dog Café; founder, Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia

Merrian Fuller, BALLE Chair; Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory

Matt Bauer, BALLE Vice Chair; founder, BetterWorld Telecom; co-founder, Lowcountry Local First

Derrell Ness, BALLE Governance Committee Chair; CEO, NSA Distribution; co-founder, Sustainable Business Network of Portland

Paul Saginaw, BALLE Treasurer and Finance Committee Chair; co-founder, Zingerman's Community of Businesses

Don Shaffer, BALLE Development Chair; president and CEO, RSF Social Finance

Who: BALLE Staff and Board

Ellen Shepard, BALLE Secretary; executive director, Andersonville Chamber of Commerce and the Andersonville Development Corporation

Baye Adofo-Wilson, founder, Lincoln Park Coast Cultural Districts

David Korten, acclaimed author; co-founder, Positive Futures Network

Jamila Payne, founder, Milla by Mail; founder, National Association of Sustainable Designers; Board Chair, Sustainable Business Network of Greater Philadelphia

Sandy Wiggins, founder, Consilience LLC; chair, e3 Bank; former chair, US Green Building Council

Trustees

Cathy Berry, Sandy River Charitable Foundation

William Shutkin, chair, sustainable development and director of the Initiative for Development and Sustainability, Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado Boulder

Who: BALLE Staff and Board

How to Contact Us

The local living economies movement grows deeper and broader, and becomes more effective, with each new network. We encourage you to contact us with questions!

To inquire about membership or to submit an application, please contact:

Alissa Barron
Network Services Director
Eastern Regional Staff Office
PO Box 5731
Takoma Park, MD 20913
Phone: 360-746-0840 x109
Email: alissa@livingeconomies.org

For general inquires about BALLE, please contact our general email address, and your question will be forwarded to the appropriate staff person:

info@livingeconomies.org

We look forward to working with you!