Impacting Illinois Communities through Sustainability Policy Engagement

Board of Trustees
Research and Innovation, Legal and Legislative Affairs Committee
August 24, 2023
Agenda

What is sustainability policy?

What is policy engagement?

Success stories
• NSF Advancing Smart Logistics
• IDNR Land and Water Conservation

Looking to the future
Background

**Director**, Institute for the Study of Environment, Sustainability, and Energy (ESE) and Environmental Studies major

**Faculty Associate**, NICCS

**Associate Professor**, Public Administration

**Illinois Innovation Network**, Chair, Research and Collaboration Working Committee
What is sustainability policy?

Policies that target at least one sphere while promoting long-term balance with others.
What is sustainability policy?

Examples:
- Municipal Climate Action Plans
- Illinois Climate and Equitable Jobs Act
- U.S. Inflation Reduction Act
What is policy engagement?

Opportunities for engagement at each stage in the policy process with **24 state agencies and over 5,000 units of local government statewide engaged in sustainability**
What is policy engagement?

Policy engagement supports multiple NIU goals:

Goal 2B: Continue to Make our Student Experience More Engaging

Goal 3A: Transdisciplinary Scholarship and Curricular Innovation

Goal 3B: Enhance the Graduate Student Experience

Goal 5A: Advance NICCS and Sustainability Initiatives

Goal 5B: Strengthen Infrastructure for Engagement
Success story: NSF Advancing Smart Logistics

Sponsor: National Science Foundation Directorate for Technology, Innovation, and Partnerships (TIPS)

Award: Regional Innovation Engines Development Planning Award for $1 million
Success story: NSF Advancing Smart Logistics

Sponsor:
National Science Foundation (TIPS)

Award:
Regional Innovation Engines $1 million

Objectives:
Transforming the state’s transportation logistics system through five core strengths:
• Interdisciplinary applied research
• Business incubation and entrepreneurship
• Adaptive lifelong and P-20 Learning
• Cross-sectoral inclusive economic development
• Deep community engagement
Success story:
NSF Advancing Smart Logistics
Success story: NSF Advancing Smart Logistics

Collaborative effort within and beyond NIU

- Institute for the Study of Environment, Sustainability, and Energy
- Center for Governmental Studies
- Center for P-20 Engagement
- Undocumented Student Resource Center
Success story: NSF Advancing Smart Logistics

Student success link
- Opportunities for degree and non-degree program development aligned with sustainable growth
- Research experiences for undergraduate and graduate students
- Visibility and impact in communities NIU students call home.

Sustainability Policy link
Deep engagement with local communities and organizations to develop and change policies to improve job access for people from underserved communities.
Success story:
IDNR Land & Water Conservation

Sponsor:
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Awards:
$845,000 for grant review support (FY22)
$1,000,000 for statewide comprehensive planning and development of a support GIS for state decision-making (FY23 - FY25)
Success story:
IDNR Land & Water Conservation

Sponsor:
Illinois Department of Natural Resources

Award:
Student-engaged planning and data support, $1,845,000 total

Objectives:
• Distribute $60 million to acquisition and development of parklands statewide, with $15 million for distressed communities
• Assist with Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan
• Develop a statewide Parks GIS
• Provide research fellowships to team of 20 graduate and undergraduate students (over $300,000 in direct student support)
• Develop mentoring and career pathways into state policy work
Success story:
IDNR Land & Water Conservation

Student success link
- Funding support through meaningful research fellowships
- Building network relationships with state and federal officials
- Seeing impact from their work in their own communities

Sustainability Policy link
Environmental conservation and gains in economic development and public health from access to park amenities, especially in economically distressed communities
External funding opportunities that require equitable public sector engagement and collaboration are increasing

- Emphasis on transdisciplinary, use-inspired, translational research
- Focus on impacts for systematically under-resourced and disadvantaged communities
Looking to the future

Many state agencies lost core policy capacity due to the pandemic

• Need for contracted support in planning and implementation
• New openness to graduate and undergraduate student work
Local governments need capacity in sustainability policy

- Current contract with Village of Wilmette to complete a Greenhouse Gas Emissions Inventory to support Climate Action Planning (interest from City of Oregon and Village of Northbrook)
- Few governments with standalone Sustainability Plan or dedicated Sustainability Manager / Coordinator to build grant-seeking, implementation, and external collaboration capacity
Students want to learn about how they can harness the power of government

- Growth in undergraduate students in the *Environmental Policy and Law* emphasis in Environmental Studies
- Developing *Environmental Policy and Management specialization* in the Public Administration graduate program
Northern Illinois University

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