

# Sustainability: Getting Involved

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**MEETING THE CHALLENGES** of sustainability will require myriad insightful and innovative technological, economic, and organizational advances.

The 2005 National Research Council report “Sustainability in the Chemical Industry: Grand Challenges and Research Needs” identified sustainability science literacy at every level of society as one of eight grand challenges to achieving the broader goal of sustainability. There are other organizations that seek to promote sustainability education in a variety of contexts and for a range of audiences, but no other organization has the technical expertise combined with both the experience with and commitment to education that ACS has demonstrated for decades.

As the world’s largest scientific society, ACS has both an opportunity and an obligation to energize and empower its more than 163,000 members to engage their knowledge and skills to help meet the challenges of a sustainable human society.

In support of these goals, the society’s Committee on Environmental Improvement (CEI) helps coordinate two awards and a local section mini-grant program.

The awards program recognizes those individuals or groups who have made exemplary contributions to the integration of sustainability into chemical education. Nominations for the awards, which must be received by CEI no later than Sept. 1 of each year, should clearly demonstrate the effective incorporation of sustainability into chemical education for one or more of the following groups: K–12 students, undergraduate students, graduate students, or the general public. Selection is based on

innovation, intellectual merit, and potential for broader impact. Because one goal of the recognition program is to encourage dissemination of the important work of creatively including sustainability in chemical education, recipients give a presentation

on their work at the spring ACS national meeting each year. More detailed information on what constitutes a complete nomination can be found on the CEI section of the ACS website.

One objective in ACS’s strategic plan is “to focus on challenges and opportunities at the intersection of chemistry and society that improve the quality of human life.” To support this objective, CEI has partnered with the Local Section Activities Committee to enhance the chemical community’s awareness of and response to sustainability. Grants of up to \$500 are available to local sections in support of sustainability programming. Information about how to apply for a mini-grant, including the application form that should be submitted to the Department of Volunteer Support, can be found on

the CEI section of the ACS webpage. Application deadlines are March 1 for proposals to be considered at the spring national meeting and Aug. 1 for consideration at the fall national meeting.

The mini-grant program is designed to encourage local sections to develop programming, in the broadest possible sense, that furthers the discussion of sustainability within and beyond the chemical enterprise. All avenues of programming are open for consideration, including (but not limited to) speakers at local section meetings, Science Cafés, workshops, educational

programs, community events, or other innovative programming concepts.

**ONE EXAMPLE** of what can be done with a mini-grant comes from the Syracuse Section, which used a mini-grant received in spring 2010 to organize a sustainability fair at the Oswego campus of the State University of New York. More than 600 people learned about green products and services provided by 49 vendors and six exhibitors. The fair was held during the university’s annual Quest event—a celebration of student and faculty research and creativity. A symposium on sustainable living and a panel discussion on energy saving and environmental protection actions that can be done by individuals were attended by many fairgoers. The event was also a great place for networking.

Finally, 2011 will mark the first presentation of the ChemLuminary Award for Outstanding Sustainability Activities, which is being sponsored by CEI. The award recognizes a local section that has introduced a new and outstanding program promoting sustainability at the local level. The award recipient will have demonstrated that the program educates people about sustainability, enhances awareness or promotes discussions between society members and the general public about sustainability, or encourages sustainable activities in the community or local businesses. Local section leaders can apply for this award through Monday, Feb. 28.

ACS is well positioned to highlight the important positive contributions that chemistry can make in addressing the challenge of sustainability. CEI hopes that both the recognitions described above and the mini-grant program will encourage society members to explore ways to help others—students, the general public, or other chemists—learn more about the critically important role of chemistry in meeting the challenge of sustainable development.

*Views expressed on this page are those of the author and not necessarily those of ACS.*



COURTESY OF MARTIN ABRAHAM

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