

# SUSTAINABLE DULUTH

Final Report of Methods, Impacts, and Results



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# Executive Summary

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This report outlines the outcomes, methods, and evaluations of the Sustainable Duluth workshop series, a collaborative effort between the City of Duluth and the Duluth Folk School. In response to surveying the community, the City and Folk School launched a series of monthly workshops from January to August, covering various sustainability topics featuring local experts. Funded by a \$6,000 grant from the Urban Sustainability Directors Network Emergent Learning Fund, the workshops were developed and managed by the City's AmeriCorps service member. The workshops were promoted through partner networks, social media, and posters. Evaluations based on onsite surveys revealed high levels of attendee satisfaction, learning, and behavioral change, demonstrating the effectiveness of sustainability-focused educational community events. The sessions focusing on funding opportunities, clean heat, and solar energy attracted the highest attendance, reflecting a pronounced interest in these areas. Participants provided constructive feedback for improvement, suggesting the incorporation of more hands-on activities, additional seating, improved sound quality, and a streamlined speaker lineup. Key insights include the success of local partnerships, the critical role of funding and capacity, and the importance of ongoing incorporation of community feedback. The series has garnered positive media coverage and is frequently cited as a model for community involvement, emphasizing the strong support from both the community and participating organizations.

**8** community workshops

**207** people engaged

**83** survey responses

**33** organizations involved

# Introduction

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This report presents the results, methods and evaluation of the Sustainable Duluth workshop series hosted by the City of Duluth in partnership with the Duluth Folk School. Evaluation was carried out using onsite surveys. Results indicate that educational, community events focused on sustainability are a successful and meaningful way to connect with individuals as attendees self-reported high levels of satisfaction, learning and behavioral change. The study concludes that partnerships and community engagement with the City have a critical role to play in influencing sustainable behavior.

## Methodology

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### Pre-assessment

A survey was conducted prior to the planning of the workshops to assess the sustainability interests and event attendance preferences of the Duluth community. Data collection occurred through tabling at various local venues including the Farmers Market, Bridging Health Conference, Hartley Environmental Learning Center Stewardship Fest, Dovetail Cafe and Market, and the UMD Sustainability Fair. A total of 48 responses were gathered, encompassing residents from diverse neighborhoods in the Duluth area. The potential topics that received the most interest were reducing carbon footprint, clean water, solar energy, growing food, public health issues, and saving money on electricity.

In response to the survey results, the City of Duluth partnered with the Duluth Folk School to establish "Sustainable Duluth: A Community How-to Workshop Series for Your Household." This initiative featured monthly workshops scheduled from January to August, aimed at empowering residents to undertake sustainability changes within their homes and community. The workshops leveraged local expertise from nonprofit organizations, government agencies, businesses, and academic institutions. Workshop topics included clean heat, funding strategies, waste management, public health initiatives, food systems, solar energy, sustainable transportation, and policy.

## Funding

The workshops were funded by the Urban Sustainability Directors Network Emergent Learning Fund. The \$6,000 grant funded the stipends for two interns, free food at all workshops, event demonstration supplies, printing, marketing materials, and a small number of speaker stipends. Many speakers volunteered their time and declined the offer of a stipend. Promotional efforts included posters, newsletters, partner collaborations, calendars, emails, and social media platforms. The project was managed by AmeriCorps VISTA, Ella Stewart and otherwise would not have been possible to manage on City staff time.

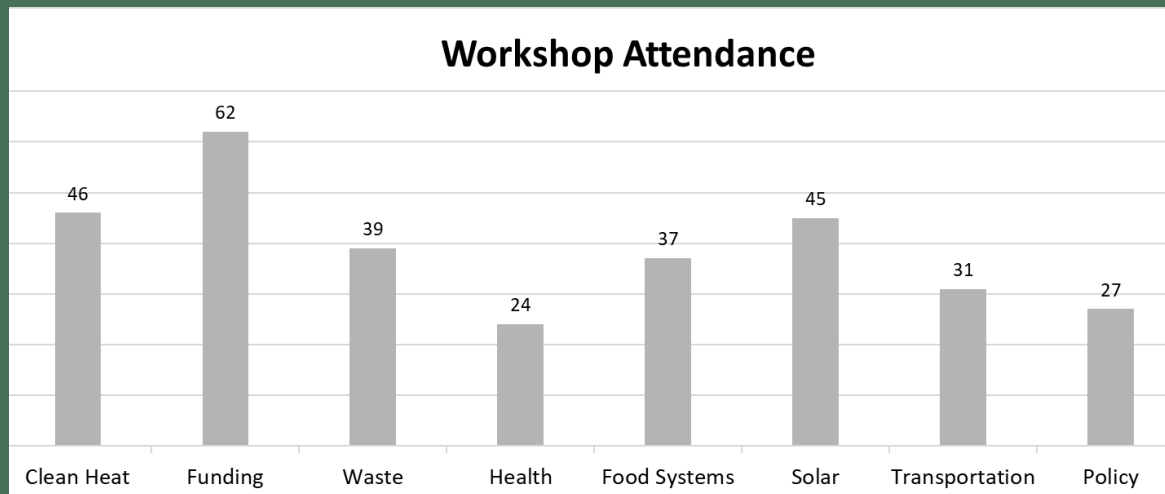
## Partners

Partnerships with local organizations were an integral part of the workshop development and content. The following organizations and departments were involved in the Sustainable Duluth series:

- Duluth Folk School
- Ecolibrium3
- Western Lake Superior Sanitary District
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- Minnesota Center for Energy and the Environment
- Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Center
- Minnesota Interfaith Power and Light
- Minnesota Power
- Twin Ports Custom Climate
- Minnesota Department of Commerce
- Clean Energy Resource Team
- Fresh Energy
- Duluth Gear Exchange
- Ren Market
- Crave by CRV
- Grandma's Marathon Sustainability
- Duluth Compost
- Harm Reduction Sisters
- American Indian Community Housing Organization
- St. Louis County Extension (Master Gardeners)
- Minnesota Board of Water and Soil Resources
- South St. Louis Soil and Water Conservation District
- Shoreview Natives
- Duluth Community Garden Program
- Museum of Solar Energy
- Wolf Track Solar
- E-Bike Duluth
- Zeitgeist
- COGGS
- Community Action Duluth
- DarkSky International
- St. Louis County
- National Weather Service

# Event Summaries

Attendees showed a notable interest in funding opportunities, clean heat topics and solar, as these sessions attracted the highest attendance. overall, the average attendance was 39 community members.



Graph showing the recorded attendance at each workshop.

The initial **clean heat** event attracted 45 attendees who engaged with topics such as heat pump technology, window insulation techniques, energy audits, and strategies for reducing energy consumption.

The second event centered on **funding opportunities** for clean energy project and had an audience of over 60 community members. Attendees were provided resources and guidance to accessing the various federal, state, and local funding options available.

The workshop on **waste** brought in about 40 attendees interested in exploring themes related to solid waste authority, waste disposal methodologies, waste reduction strategies, and future trends in waste management practices.

The **public health** workshop had 25 participants who gathered to explore the nexus of health, equity, and environmental concerns. Topics included environmental justice, asthma management, lead testing, and light pollution.



Picture showing attendance at the funding workshop in February 2024.

The workshop focused on **food systems** brought participation from 45 attendees interested in local food systems, gardening, agriculture, and pollinators.

The **solar energy** workshop attracted more than 40 attendees to learn about how solar works, the process of installing solar panels, and how to finance solar projects.

The **transportation** event had over 30 attendees and covered transportation service management, pathways to accessible and sustainable infrastructure, and the benefits of alternative transportation modes.

The final workshop on **policy** dived into the development, implementation and evaluation of sustainable policy, and brought in 27 attendees.

Full summaries on the events can be found at [bit.ly/sustainableduluth](https://bit.ly/sustainableduluth)

# Evaluation and Results

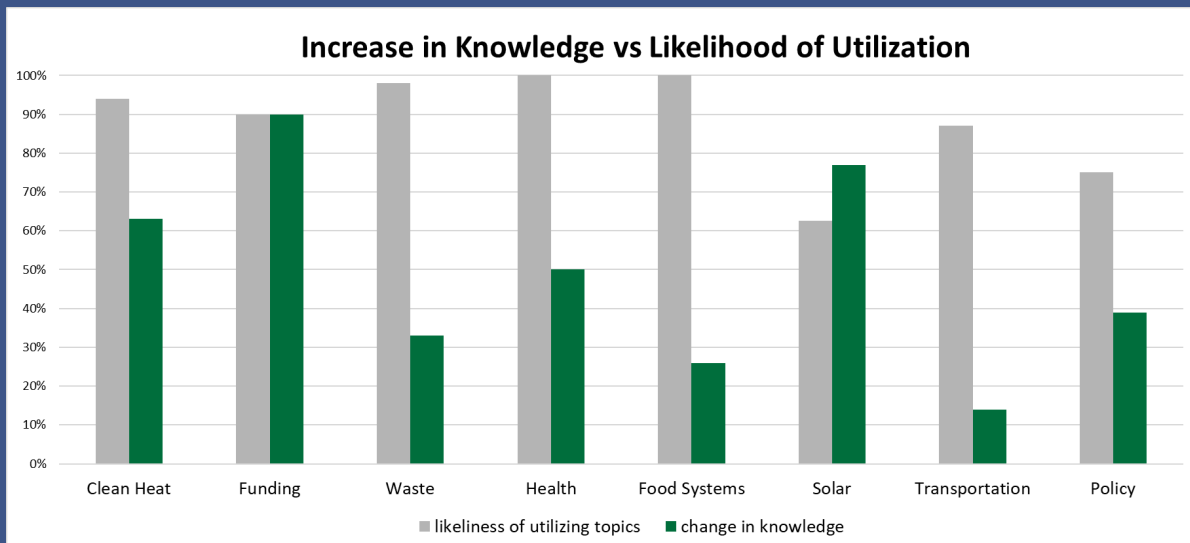
Following each event, a survey was conducted to evaluate the workshops' effectiveness. The following questions were asked:

- How well did this workshop fit your needs?
- Before this event, how knowledgeable were you on {topic}?
- After this event, how knowledgeable do you feel on {topic}?
- How likely are you to use what you have learned today?
- What was your biggest takeaway from the workshop?
- What would have made this workshop better, if anything?
- How likely are you to attend another Sustainability Duluth workshop
- Please include any other questions, comments, or concerns regarding this workshop or future workshops.

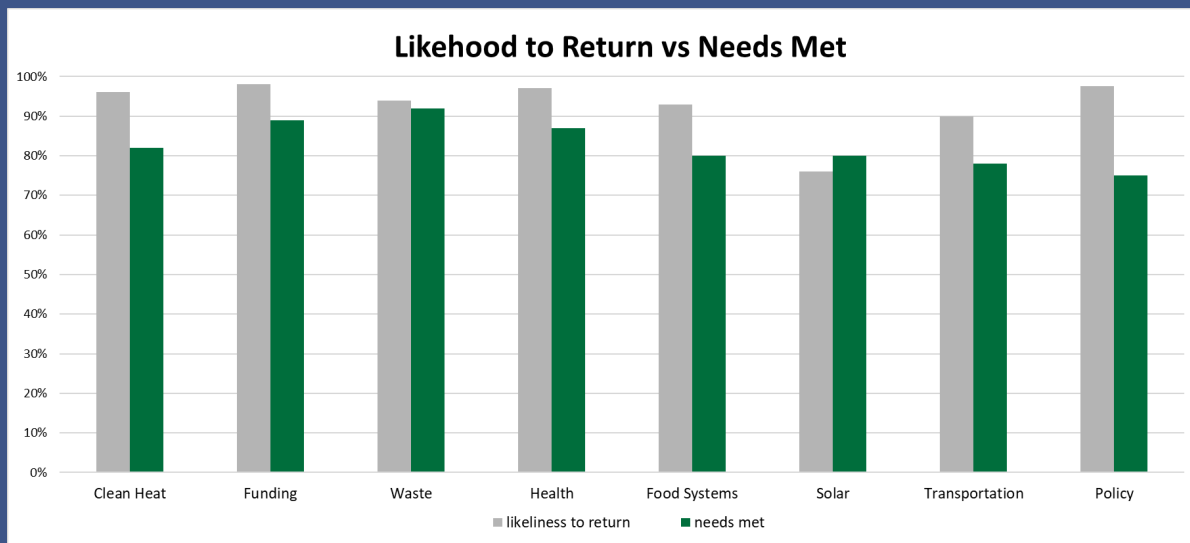
Attendees were able to self assess how well the workshop fit their needs on a scale of 1 being "Not Well" to 5 being "Very Well." Similarly, questions gauged participants' likelihood of applying the workshop information in their lives and their willingness to attend future workshops, aiming to assess practical relevance and ongoing engagement.

Attendees self-assessed their knowledge levels on topics introduced at each workshop using a five-point scale ranging from "Not at all Knowledgeable" to "Very Knowledgeable." There were two open ended questions to identify the biggest takeaways and possible improvements.

There were a total of 83 survey responses from the eight workshops. Attendees rated the workshops highly on usefulness, alignment with expectations, and likelihood of applying the information in their lives, **averaging scores of 4.4 out of 5.**



Graph showing the self-reported percent increase of knowledge on topics in comparison to the percentage likeliness to apply the resources to their life.



Graph showing the self-reported percent likeliness to reattend the workshops in comparison to the percentage of needs being met in terms of expectations and comfort.

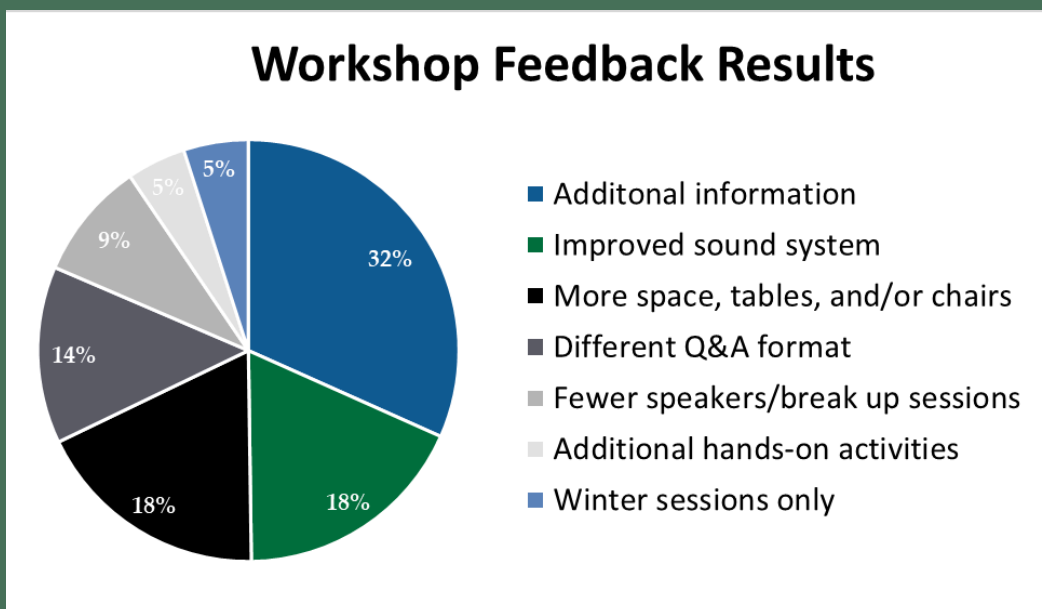
Based on self reported survey results, attendees reported:

- Average of **4.1 out of 5** for having needs met at workshops
- Average **4.6 out of 5** with likeliness to attend another workshop
- Average of **4.4 out of 5** with likeliness to apply what they've learned in the workshops to their life
- **78%** of survey attendees reported an increase in knowledge



# Feedback

The survey concluded with three open-ended questions. Participants were asked to reflect on their main takeaways from the event, highlighting the most impactful aspects of the workshop. They were also invited to provide suggestions for improving future workshops, enabling adjustments and enhancements throughout the series. Lastly, the survey offered an opportunity for attendees to share any additional comments, allowing them to voice further feedback or concerns about their workshop experience.



Graph showing the self-reported feedback shared in the open-ended portion by percentage and grouped by general topic.

## General

The general feedback from attendees included requests for additional space and chairs to accommodate everyone comfortably along with an improved sound systems. Additionally, as the series spanned several months, attendees noted a preference for winter sessions rather than being inside on a nice day. There was a desire for more hands-on activities during the sessions and clipboards provided to facilitate note-taking. Participants suggested allocating more time for question-and-answer sessions to delve deeper into the topics discussed. Several attendees provided additional comments expressing gratitude for organizing the workshop series and for offering educational opportunities in an accessible venue.

## Clean Heat

Participants identified multiple key takeaways and suggestions for improvement. One attendee expressed satisfaction with the event's impact on Duluth and noted the value of community participation. The most significant takeaways reported by attendees included:

- Recognizing the significance of energy audits as an initial step.
- Committing to further research on heat pump technologies and arranging for energy audits.
- Initiating actions such as insulating windows and inspecting basement insulation.
- Continuing efforts in weatherization and initiating savings for future heat pump investments.
- Exploring available rebates from local programs for heat pumps, water heaters, and other appliances.
- Prioritizing the insulation of attic spaces and basement rim joists to enhance energy efficiency.

## Funding

Several key takeaways were reported including the importance of obtaining an energy audit and emphasized the need to plan for future energy efficiency upgrades. Additionally, many expressed intentions to capitalize on available funding opportunities. Notably, following feedback from the first event survey, handouts were introduced for attendees. Key takeaways included:

- Developing a readiness plan to utilize available funding.
- Scheduling a home energy audit.
- Begin planning for electrification.
- Consider investing in new kitchen appliances and solar panels.
- Exploring rebates for ground source heat pumps.

## Food Systems

Attendees did not specify singular key takeaways, but a significant number expressed keen interest in initiating their own pollinator gardens. Suggestions for enhancement included reducing the number of speakers or dividing the event into two sessions, incorporating more hands-on activities, and providing greater depth of information specifically on pollinators.

## Waste

Attendees identified several takeaways including the importance of contacting their recycling service provider to ascertain which items are recyclable. Other takeaways included:

- Engaging with legislators regarding electronics recycling policies.
- Exploring practices such as upcycling and low-impact living.
- Education on waste reduction strategies and home design considerations for homeowners.

## Public Health

The workshop garnered positive feedback from attendees who highlighted several key takeaways. These included learning the proper methods for recycling batteries, gaining insights into PFAS, lead testing procedures, and asthma management. Attendees recommended to advertise the workshop as 'environmental justice' to gain higher attendance. Other takeaways included:

- Supporting the geothermal heat capture project.
- Learning more about proper techniques for recycling batteries.
- Historical insights into environmental justice issues in the Lincoln Park neighborhood.
- Awareness of the impacts of light pollution
- Knowledge gained about PFAS contamination, methods for lead testing, and management strategies for asthma.

## Solar

No key takeaways or improvements were noted but attendees requested a full list of rebates and estimated timelines for installation.

## Transportation

No key takeaways or improvements were noted but attendees requested more information on the West Superior St. Reconstruction project. One respondent highlighted the discussion on discouraging personal vehicle usage through recreational neighborhoods.

## Policy

Attendees noted a need for resources for community members to get involved into advocacy for sustainability policy and local groups.

# Insights for Success

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## Key Insights

- A strong collaboration with the Duluth Folk School and local organizations significantly boosted community trust and event participation. Partnering with a reputable local entity further enhanced the project's credibility.
- While USDN funding played a crucial role in offering free food and intern stipends, exploring alternative funding sources like CERTs annual mini-grants could be considered if USDN funding becomes unavailable in the future. Providing complimentary food at events, although not a primary motivator for attendees, was still valued as an added perk.
- Distributing printed handouts containing resources and speaker information effectively enhanced attendees' experience. Additionally summarizing events on the City's website was beneficial for those who could not attend.
- Speakers often declined stipends due to established relationships. Additionally, the process of disbursing stipends from the City was complex and required a W-9 form.
- An AmeriCorps Vista or a similar position would be required to manage the project at the City.

## Areas for Improvement

- Rather than having two interns start for the beginning of the project, consistently employing one intern throughout the entire project for constant capacity.
- Workshop formats could be enhanced by having more in-depth workshops on one topic with fewer speakers and more time for questions.
- Alternative method for data collection and surveys for improved organization and analysis.
- Events in the summer months may have received lower attendance due to being indoors.

The project's success was attributed to strong partnerships, strategic allocation of USDN grant funds, and the ongoing incorporation of community feedback and support.

# Conclusion

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The series of sustainability workshops concluded with positive feedback and valuable insights from participants. Surveys conducted after each event revealed increased knowledge and strong engagement. The workshops successfully leveraged partnerships with local organizations, particularly the Duluth Folk School, to build community trust and boost attendance. While USDN funding was crucial for providing free food and intern stipends, alternative funding sources like CERTs mini-grants were identified as potential substitutes.

Attendees rated the workshops highly on usefulness, alignment with expectations, and likelihood of applying the information in their lives, averaging scores of **4.1 to 4.6 out of 5**. Attendees showed a notable interest in funding opportunities, clean heat, and solar, as these sessions attracted the highest attendance.

Suggestions for improvement included more hands-on activities, additional seating, better sound quality, additional information, and fewer speakers. Future workshops are expected to benefit from expanded partnerships and a more focused exploration of specific topics.

The series has garnered positive media coverage and is frequently cited as a model for community involvement, emphasizing the strong support from both the community and participating organizations. There were many returning speakers and attendees who appreciated the time to network and ask questions. The events were featured on WDIO and the Duluth News Tribune. While the City has no current plans to replicate the events, there are hopes to build upon the momentum.

Overall, the project demonstrated the effectiveness of community engagement and continuous feedback integration. The project laid a strong foundation for future climate action by focusing on both immediate educational outcomes and long-term capacity building. By utilizing local expertise and forming strong partnerships with community organizations, the project fostered a collaborative environment that is likely to endure and continue to support climate action in Duluth over time.



A special thank you goes out to the Duluth Folk School and Dovetail Café for partnering on this event series and providing event space, the Urban Sustainability Directors Network for providing the grant to make this possible, and all the presenters who volunteered their time to share their stories. Thank you to interns Sam Schmall, Emma Hill and Chloe Grenzow for their contributions to this report.



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