

Student Affairs Learning Improvement Application

Please complete the application below to apply for the learning improvement initiative with Student Affairs Support Services ([SASS](#)) within the Center for Assessment and Research Studies ([CARS](#)). This initiative is a partnership between SASS and the Division of Student Affairs to focus on the improvement of student learning and development.

At Madison, we value improvement of learning and development, which can be accomplished by well-thought-out programming and assessment. In turn, a complete and coherent application is a first step to making such initiatives successful. **Applications are due May 15th.**

There are two options for when programs may begin the project: Summer or Fall. In the application, you will be asked to indicate whether you plan to begin the project in the Summer or Fall. Please select a starting date that best aligns with your office schedule. **Selected programs will be notified by May 31st.**

Please select one starting date: Summer
 Fall Semester

Although several application questions will ask you to describe previous assessment results and previous improvement efforts, programs will not be selected based on the number of years they have conducted assessment or demonstrated improvement. **Rather, programs will be selected based on readiness and commitment to a long-term improvement process.** Up to 2 programs will be selected per year based on their readiness and commitment.

Should any questions arise while completing this application, you may contact SASS (SASS@jmu.edu). Once completed, submit your application to the co-chairs (Sarah Sunde, sundesa@jmu.edu; Kathleen Campbell, campbekl@jmu.edu) of the [Student Affairs Assessment Advisory Council](#) for review.

I.

Program Overview

In this section, please provide general information about your program. Responses are meant to be **short**, as you will have the opportunity to provide more detail in the sections below.

- a. Name of applicant's office:

Office of Campus Housing (OCH)

- b. Name of program of interest:

Second-Year Resident Sustainability Initiative (SYRSI)

- c. Purpose of the program (1 paragraph max):

The purpose of this program is to assist in the development of sustainability knowledge, practices, and attitudes among second-year JMU students living in campus residence halls. We aim to provide students with the knowledge they need to critically evaluate how their behavioral and consumption patterns relate to varying, interconnected issues of sustainability, and empower them to make meaningful changes to these patterns when necessary.

- d. Number of students who complete the program:

All second-year students living in residence halls (approximately 1600 students per year)

- e. Number of staff members who facilitate the program:

1 OCH staff member and 7 resident advisors (1 per dormitory with upperclassman housing)

- f. Point person/primary overseer of the program:

Caroline Prendergast, Second-Year Resident Sustainability Initiative (SYRSI) Coordinator

II.

Current Assessment of Student Learning Outcomes

The goal of this section is to ensure your office is well acquainted with the assessment process. We find that offices that have carefully thought about programming and assessment are in a better position to make improvements. In the space below, please provide a **brief** summary of the program of interest. In your summary, please include 1) your student learning and development outcomes; 2) a **general/broad** description of the programming in which students are provided the opportunity to learn or develop; and 3) the procedures used to assess whether the desired outcomes are actually being met. Careful consideration of these questions is crucial to the success of a learning improvement project. Please address 1, 2, and 3 within 1 to 2 pages maximum:

1. Goals and Student Learning Outcomes

General Goals:

1. Increase students' awareness about issues of sustainability
2. Develop students' ability to reason about their surroundings and behaviors through the lens of sustainability
3. Create more sustainable on-campus housing programs for JMU

Student Learning Outcomes:

Learning outcomes for the program are divided into 3 components: knowledge, attitudes, and behavior.

Knowledge

- K1. 90% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to define sustainability.
- K2. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to explain how environmental, social, and economic systems intersect in the three-dimensional sustainability model.
- K3. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to list 2 ways they can conserve energy while living on campus.
- K4. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to list 2 ways they can contribute to social sustainability on campus.
- K5. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to list 2 ways they can contribute to a sustainable local economy.
- K6. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to identify sustainable and unsustainable practices in a case study.
- K7. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will be able to explain how present-day sustainability decisions could influence future generations.
- K8. Students who participate in the SYRSI program will demonstrate greater gains in sustainability literacy (as measured by the Environmental Stewardship Reasoning and Knowledge Assessment, or ESRKA) compared to students who lived off-campus during their sophomore year (didn't participate in the program).

Attitudes

- A1. Students who participate in the SYRSI program, on average, will report a 25% increase in likelihood to make a hypothetical major purchase from a local business instead of a large corporation, as compared to baseline measurement at the beginning of the program.
- A2. Students who participate in the SYRSI program, on average, will report a 25% increase in value attributed to environmental sustainability programs, as compared to baseline measurement at the beginning of the program.
- A3. Students who participate in the SYRSI program, on average, will report a 25% increase in value attributed to social sustainability efforts, as compared to baseline measurement at the beginning of the program.
- A4. Students who participate in the SYRSI program, on average, will report a 25% increase in value attributed to economic sustainability efforts, as compared to baseline measurement at the beginning of the program.

Behavior

- B1. 75% of students who participate in the SYRSI program will report engaging in resource-conservation behaviors in the past week.
- B2. Students who participate in SYRSI program will be 25% more likely to report attending a cultural event related to sustainability, as compared to students who did not participate in SYRSI program.
- B3. Students who participate in SYRSI program will be 50% more likely to report recently reading about a current event, development, or debate related to sustainability, as compared to baseline measurement at beginning of program.

2. Description of Programming

The yearlong SYRSI program provides sustainability learning opportunities for second-year students living in campus residence halls. The programming was developed to align with the American College Personnel Association's (2008) monograph on sustainability practices in student affairs. The ACPA calls for a "triple bottom line" approach to sustainability, encompassing "healthy environments, social justice, and strong economies" (2008, p. 8). The ACPA argues that sustainability education is a critical component of higher education because it enhances the educational process; helps students apply theory to their experiences; prepares students to be effective citizens and employees; attracts high-quality students, faculty, and staff; saves university resources; and improves institutional reputations (ACPA, 2008).

The aim of our programming is to engage students in sustainability-related conversations, so they are able to understand and work to solve sustainability issues within a variety of contexts and constraints. Ideally, students who have completed the SYRSI program will critically evaluate their behaviors, surroundings, and attitudes in order to make sustainable decisions that are nuanced and context-dependent.

The programming contains four main components that, together, are designed to educate students about sustainability practices and concepts. More importantly, however, they are designed to provide opportunities for discussion, application, and critical consideration of environmental, economic, and social sustainability within the campus, local, national, and global communities. More specific information about each activity is provided below.

- Programs on the “three Es” (equality, environment, economy): During a series of one-hour programs, students learn about each of the three components of sustainability (healthy environments, social justice, and strong economies). Each program will include a presentation about the component, followed by a scaffolded, interactive discussion of a case study about a related sustainability issue.
- Clothing/electronics swap: During the spring semester, each dormitory will organize and facilitate a clothing and electronics swap. The goal of this event is to divert waste from landfills while offering low- or no-cost clothing and electronics to students as well as the local community. In the weeks prior to the event, students will learn about the sustainability implications of recycling, reusing, and repairing consumer items through a series of brief programs in their residence halls.
- Local Sustainability Speaker Series: The Office of Campus Housing will collaborate with community businesses and organizations to provide a series of presentations about sustainability within the Harrisonburg community. This series will allow students to connect to the local community and see how professionals in Harrisonburg implement sustainability initiatives within their work.
- Volunteer Days: SYRSI students are asked to attend 2 non-mandatory volunteer events. Volunteer events will be brief (2-4 hours), led by an RA, and specifically designed to enhance students’ understanding of social justice and environmental health in the Harrisonburg community. Following the volunteer experience, the RA will lead a debriefing discussion about how the experience related to issues of sustainability. The purpose of Volunteer Days is twofold: students have an opportunity to experience sustainability initiatives directly, and they gain valuable experiences in and connections to the local community.

3. Assessment Procedures and Current Findings

Currently, our assessment relies on the Environmental Stewardship Reasoning and Knowledge Assessment (ESRKA), which was developed at JMU to assess changes in students’ reasoning and knowledge over time. A sample of JMU students complete this measure during Assessment Day immediately prior to their first semester of coursework and again in the spring of their sophomore year. This means that we only have data for the students who happened to be part of the sample that took the ESRKA assessment. In previous years, we have analyzed the change in ESRKA scores at the two time points and compared the growth in students who lived off campus during their sophomore year and students who lived on campus during their sophomore year. Generally, we have found that students who live on campus their sophomore year do not demonstrate significantly more growth in ESRKA scores between freshman and sophomore years than students who live off campus. We think this is due to inconsistent delivery of our programming. Additionally, because the measure is administered early in the second semester of sophomore year, students have not fully completed the SYRSI experience by the time data are collected. Finally, the ESRKA is specifically focused on environmental stewardship. As repeatedly noted in the literature on sustainability, this is only one of the three components of effective sustainability. Currently, we do not use any measures of student perceptions toward various elements of sustainability. Including assessments of these particular goals in future assessment efforts is a critical component of ensuring alignment between our student learning objectives and assessment practices.

III.

Focus of Partnership with SASS

You may want to improve learning/development related to all outcomes. However, for this partnership, you will need to **select 1 or 2** learning/development outcomes on which to focus. These outcomes should be sufficiently important to warrant the ample resources that will be devoted to improving all related programming and assessment activities.

The most crucial information you will provide in this section concerns the **program theory** that guides your program. In other words, how was your programming *intentionally designed* to achieve the student learning and development outcomes you've decided to focus on for this partnership? Programs that have not given this considerable thought will find it difficult to engage in a learning improvement initiative.

- a. Student learning/development outcome(s) **selected** for the improvement initiative (1 or 2):

Objective B3: Students will be 50% more likely to report recently reading about a current event, development, or debate related to sustainability, as compared to baseline measurement at the beginning of the program.

Objective K6: 75% of students will be able to identify sustainable and unsustainable practices in a case study.

- b. Description of **why** these outcomes were selected for the learning improvement initiative. Why are these outcomes important to your department? (1-2 paragraphs):

Because one of the major goals of the SYRSI program is to help students learn to reason about their surroundings and behaviors through the lens of sustainability, we believe it is important that students participating in the program become inquisitive and self-reflective in regard to sustainability in their personal lives. Given the existing research on learner-centered, action-oriented, and transformative learning approaches (discussed below), our department has decided that we should focus on objectives that seek to engage students in critical reflection of their surroundings. Although development of general knowledge about sustainability topics is also important, these theories of learning indicate that meaningful change occurs when individuals are guided through active learning processes and then provided with scaffolded opportunities to construct knowledge on their own. Meeting Objective B3 indicates that students increase their individual engagement with current events related to sustainability, while meeting Objective K6 indicates that students are able to think critically about sustainability issues in complex, realistic scenarios. Although we also value changing the attitudes of students toward issues of sustainability, we believe that these two objectives are of critical importance because they represent long-lasting changes in students' patterns of thinking that are likely to last beyond their second-year experience.

- c. Description of why these outcomes are important to JMU (1 paragraph):

The two selected objectives closely align with JMU's vision and strategic plan. JMU's vision is to become a national model for the "engaged university," in which students are actively engaged with ideas and the world around them. For students to live engaged lives, they must regularly seek new information and use it to reflect upon themselves and their surroundings. Further, Goal 1A of JMU's Strategic Plan specifies education in a variety of areas, including sustainability, as an important component of fostering student success. The selected objectives reflect patterns of deep engagement with sustainability ideas and practices. Objective B3 presents an application of personal engagement within the context of sustainability: students who are actively seeking out current events, developments and debates related to sustainability are demonstrating

engagement with the topic, thereby providing evidence of JMU’s vision of the engaged university in action. Objective K6 represents the use of sustainability knowledge in an applied manner, indicating students’ ability to apply sustainability concepts within a given context. It is also worth noting that few other universities have institutionalized, research-based approaches to residence life sustainability initiatives. By pursuing this goal, JMU has the opportunity to position itself as a national leader in on-campus sustainability efforts.

Finally, sustainability is a key component of Harrisonburg’s proposed 2018 Comprehensive Plan. Goal 11 of the Plan is “to preserve and enhance the City’s natural environment for future generations through education and policies that encourage development that is compatible with nature and that builds climate resiliency and social responsibility within the community.” Pursuit of the selected objectives provides the JMU community with an important opportunity to work alongside the city of Harrisonburg to pursue common goals via bold sustainability initiatives.

- d. Description of the specific programming (curriculum, pedagogy, intervention, etc.) used to provide students with an opportunity to meet the **selected outcome(s) only**. An objective-to-curriculum map should be included as part of this description (may be attached as an appendix):

An objective-to-curriculum map is included below. The SLOs we would like to focus on with SASS are identified in bold. This map demonstrates that three of the four components of the SYRSI program (Three Es program, Local Sustainability Speaker Series, and Volunteer Days) map to the selected objectives. These components are designed using values-beliefs-norms theory as well as learner-centered, action-oriented, and transformative approaches to pedagogy. Overall, these program components seek to provide students with the information that they need to interpret real-life experiences while they actively construct and alter their knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs. Changes to beliefs are then expected to lead, eventually, to lasting changes in students’ sustainability behaviors across a variety of contexts.

	Three Es program	Clothing and Electronics Swap	Local Sustainability Speaker Series	Volunteer days
Obj. K1	X			
Obj. K2	X			X
Obj. K3	X			
Obj. K4	X	X	X	X
Obj. K5	X		X	
Obj. K6	X		X	X
Obj. K7	X			
Obj. K8	X	X	X	X
Obj. A1	X		X	
Obj. A2	X	X		
Obj. A3	X			X
Obj. A4	X		X	
Obj. B1	X	X		
Obj. B2	X			X
Obj. B3	X		X	X

- e. Describe *how* this programming is expected to result in the desired student learning/development outcome(s). In other words, please explain the logic behind why certain program features were chosen to achieve the selected outcomes. This is often referred to as program theory or logic. If you are unfamiliar with these terms, please watch [this short introductory video](#) before constructing your response (1 page max). If you need support using program logic to develop curriculum/programming, please visit JMU's Center for Faculty Innovation (CFI):

The programming relies on value-belief-norm (VBN) theory, which posits that abstract personal values impact beliefs and attitudes about the world, which form personal moral norms, which influence personal behaviors (Whitley, Takahashi, Zwickle, Besley, & Lertpratchya, 2016). By changing personal moral norms about sustainability and making those norms salient, behaviors should change accordingly to avert negative consequences (Stern, Dietz, Abel, Guagnano, & Kalof, 1999) such as those that may result from unsustainable behaviors (Whitley et al.). This theory has been used to examine environmental and sustainability beliefs in multiple countries and cultures, including American college students living in on-campus housing (e.g. Whitley et al., 2016). Ideally, our programs will influence students' values regarding sustainability, which will eventually lead to changes in students' normative frameworks and beliefs about sustainability. Eventually, this will result in increased sustainability behaviors (including regular attention to current events concerning sustainability, as targeted by Objective B3). Whitley et al. (2016) argue that effective approaches to increasing sustainability behavior should be informed by behavioral motivation theories—like VBN—rather than assuming that the mere delivery of knowledge will be sufficient to create change. Our programming therefore includes delivery of knowledge about sustainability issues and practices, but it also aims to help create dormitory cultures in which issues of sustainability are regularly discussed and examined constructively in order to influence student values, beliefs, and norms about sustainable decisions and lifestyles. Appendix 1 contains a visual depiction of the VBN model.

Additional support for our programming is drawn from global sustainability initiatives. The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has included 17 sustainable development goals in its 2030 Agenda, seeking to create economic, equitable, and environmental change across a variety of sectors (UNESCO, 2017). UNESCO's approach to education for sustainable development is well-aligned with the following pedagogical approaches, which will be used in addition to VBN theory to develop programming:

1. Learner-centered approach: This approach to teaching focuses on the role of the educator as a facilitator, centralizing learners' reflection on pre-existing knowledge and construction of their own ideas (Barth, 2015).
2. Action-oriented learning: This approach identifies four main stages of the experiential learning cycle: a) concrete experiences, b) observation and reflection, c) formation of abstract concepts for generalization, and d) application of abstract concepts to new situations (Kolb, 1984). The educator's purpose is to create an environment in which the learner can relate experiences to abstract concepts (UNESCO, 2017).
3. Transformative learning: This approach seeks to empower learners to challenge their worldviews in order to co-create new knowledge (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012). The educator's role is to encourage the learner to question their perceptions of the world (UNESCO, 2017).

Generally, these theories indicate the centrality of facilitating student growth and independent thought. Specifically, these approaches place less emphasis on lecture-style teaching, instead advocating discourse and active learning (Scarff Seatter & Ceulemas, 2017). We expect the use of these methods will result in students taking ownership over their sustainability education and

behaviors, thereby resulting in greater awareness of current events concerning sustainability (e.g., Objective B3). We also expect the emphasis on distilling abstract concepts, which may then be applied to new situations, will result in increased ability to critique novel scenarios (e.g., Objective K6). These theories are also supportive of the integration of sustainability education within on-campus housing environments, where programming is necessarily integrated with students' out-of-class lives.

A general logic model displaying the hypothesized relationship between the program components, activities, intermediate outcomes, and general long term outcomes is displayed in Appendix 2.

- f. Summarize the results of previous assessment related to the selected outcomes (1 page max):

In previous years, our only assessment measure has been the ESRKA. Although this measure provides useful information, it does not provide data that can be used to evaluate progress towards Objectives B3 and K6. Therefore, we do not have previous results for our selected outcomes.

IV.

Action Plan

In this section, you will be asked to consider why the student learning/development outcomes you selected are not being met and propose possible strategies for addressing these obstacles.

- a. For each selected outcome, provide an explanation/hypothesis about why current programming is not supporting student learning/development to the degree you desire (1 page max):

Although we have not assessed Objectives K6 and B3, discussions with RAs and students have led us to believe that the SYRSI participants were not able to engage critically with sustainability topics and current events in the ways these objectives require. Generally, we believe the problems with our programming stem from inconsistent exposure to sustainability concepts throughout the SYRSI experience. Although the program has been implemented each year in some form since 2012, a unified program was not developed until the past academic year. The Office of Campus Housing provides support for residence life programs, but programming is ultimately designed and delivered by individual RAs. Some of these individuals are knowledgeable and passionate about sustainability efforts, others are not. Although we designed programming and made materials available to all RAs in previous years, the programs were not necessarily implemented in part or in full by each RA. This means that, if anything, students often received only cursory information about sustainability concepts.

- b. Prior to this new partnership with SASS, have you tried to **improve** student learning/development related to these outcomes? If so, please describe the improvement initiatives. Have those initiatives been successful? (1 page max):

After we noticed that students participating in previous iterations of the SYRSI were not demonstrating more growth on the ESRKA than students who lived off-campus during their sophomore year, we worked to develop consistent sustainability programming that the RAs could use as a resource. Our goal was to provide ready-made resources for dormitory programming that the RAs could implement without having to learn about sustainability and pedagogical theory on their own, as most RAs are busy students with limited time to spend on program development. Although we worked hard to ensure that sustainability programming resources were well-researched and supported by theory, we did not require RAs to use the

resources in their programming. Because many RAs ultimately chose not to use the resources, programming did not become more consistent.

End-of-year discussions with the RAs indicated that the programming we provided was too long and unwieldy, making it difficult to implement in programs that students would actually attend (as most dormitory programming is not mandatory for residents). The programs were lecture-based, which we hoped would provide structure for RAs who lacked sustainability knowledge but instead seemed to result in low student interest and attendance. Some programs took three hours or more to implement, and many students were not willing to commit to attending a program that would take so long. Some RAs were unaware that the resources existed. The two RAs who did implement sustainability programming using the provided resources found that the second-year residents who attended the programming were very interested in the materials, although they wanted more hands-on activities, fewer lecture-style presentations, and shorter programs. However, many students elected not to attend the events. Although hall programming can be marked as “mandatory” by RAs, there is no real consequence for the students who do not attend. Unfortunately, this is not something we are able to change in coming years, so we have focused on revising the materials to make events more appealing to students so that they want to attend and participate fully. These efforts resulted in the four-part programming outlined under Section II above, which aims to integrate feedback from previous versions with the SYRSI with theoretically sound interventions to more consistently impact students’ sustainability attitudes, knowledge, and behaviors. Additionally, we revised our SLOs in anticipation of developing new assessment strategies for the newly redesigned program.

- c. Based on your answers to the questions above, what changes to a) your programming and b) your assessment processes do you believe are necessary to demonstrate improvements in student learning/development?

Given the problems outlined above, we are making the following changes to the sustainability programming offered to RAs of second-year students, to begin in Fall 2019:

- Implementation of the core programming has become mandatory for all RAs overseeing second-year students.
- All RAs overseeing second-year students will attend a two-day sustainability training prior to move-in day, and will attend regular meetings with OCH that are specifically devoted to SYRSI implementation throughout the school year.
- Programming has been made clearer, briefer, and more participatory. In an effort to increase the likelihood that implementation fidelity will be high, we worked to refine resources provided to RAs to make them easier to follow and more engaging for students.
- Ongoing support systems have been developed to ensure that RAs have the information and resources they need to implement the programs effectively.

Additionally, we would like assistance from SASS to develop new assessment tools. Currently, most of our objectives are not assessed. To begin, we would like to spend this summer working with SASS to develop measures to assess Objectives K6 and B3. Because both objectives are growth-oriented, we would like to administer a pre-test to SYRSI participants sometime around their move-in day at the beginning of the school year, and a post-test sometime around the end of the school year. Assessment of Objective K6 will require the creation of case studies as well as scoring guides. We would like help making sure that these materials are designed soundly.

- d. Provide a detailed timeline that articulates your plan to improve student learning/development to the degree you desire. This timeline should include 1) whether you plan to begin this work in

Summer or Fall, 2) plans to initially assess the program, 3) plans to make programmatic changes, and 4) plans to re-assess the program:

- **Summer 2019:** Develop case studies and scoring guides for assessment of Objective K6, as well as a survey to address Objective B3. We are planning to send a link to a Qualtrics survey to all participating students around the time of move-in day, although we would appreciate feedback on appropriate timing for sending the link.
- **Fall 2019:** Shortly before the academic year begins, RAs will attend the two-day sustainability training workshop. Students will complete the pre-test at the beginning of the semester. Soon after, students will begin to attend the newly redesigned SYRSI events in their respective residence halls.
- **Spring 2020:** Students will continue to attend SYRSI events. At the end of the semester, students will complete the post-test. Again, we would appreciate feedback on appropriate timing for collecting data.
- **Late spring/early summer 2020:** We will compare pre- and post-test data to assess students' progress on Objectives K6 and B3.
- **Summer 2020:** Following data analysis, we will revisit our programming and make any necessary changes for the 2020-2021 academic year.

V.

Commitment to Partnership

One of the most important resources needed to evidence student learning improvement is time. As such, **each program will commit 10 hours per week to the initiative.** This amount of time is necessary to think critically about the program, collect evidence regarding student learning and development, and engage in evidence-based, intentional program redesign. By committing this time up front, programs will be able to distribute other responsibilities accordingly.

a. Weekly Time Commitment (10 hours/week)

Please select a Lead Coordinator who will serve as the primary contact and chief overseer of the initiative. This person may choose to commit all ten hours each week, or assemble a team to share the workload. *Note: Graduate assistants may lend support where needed, but most decisions/discussions will require extensive familiarity with the program over several years, an understanding of the program theory/logic behind the program, knowledge of departmental resources, and a level of authority beyond what most graduate students possess. As such, graduate assistants may not serve as lead coordinators and should contribute less than 1/3 of the total hours spent on the initiative each week.*

b. Support from Direct Supervisor (1 hour/week)

Regular contributions from upper-level administrators are crucial to the long-term success of a learning improvement initiative and, in turn, the future of the program. Direct Supervisor, please sign below to indicate **a commitment of 1 hour per week** to the learning improvement project detailed in this application. This time may be spent in whatever manner is most helpful to the program.

Lead Coordinator:

(Name) (Signature) (Date)

Other Team Members (names only; no signatures required):

Direct Supervisor (1 hour commitment each week):

(Name) (Signature) (Date)

Director:

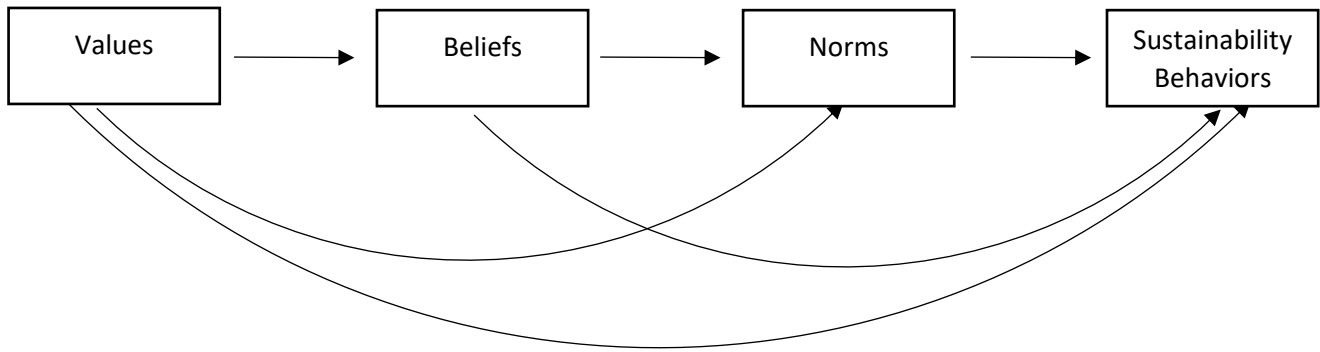
(Name) (Signature) (Date)

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Appendix 1

Values-beliefs-norms model (see Whitley, et al., 2016)



Appendix 2: Logic model showing hypothesized long-term outcomes of SYRSI program

