CALL FOR PROPOSALS
A systematic review of the body of research on decision-making for sustainability

**Question:** How do individuals make decisions involving social or environmental issues?

**Funding:** Cdn$25,000 (unrestricted), including taxes

**Proposal Deadline:** December 1, 2010

**Project Deadline:** September 1, 2011

1. **Background**
The Network for Business Sustainability (NBS) funds systematic reviews based on the top priorities for business sustainability identified by its Leadership Council. These reviews have three objectives:
   1. Inform business sustainability practice and policy by providing decision-makers with a synthesis of what we know and what we don’t know on the topic at hand based on the best available evidence.
   2. Facilitate the development of future business sustainability knowledge by describing the state of the existing body of literature and identifying important gaps.
   3. Assist university educators and corporate trainers to teach business sustainability using new, evidence-based teaching materials.

These projects provide an opportunity for researchers to shape practice by addressing a topic that is top of mind for practitioners. They are disseminated worldwide to researchers and practitioners through the NBS and its partner institutions.

The outputs from the Network’s past systematic reviews are available from [http://www.nbs.net/tag/systematic-review/](http://www.nbs.net/tag/systematic-review/).

2. **Systematic Reviews**

3. **Project Description**
**How do individuals make decisions involving social or environmental issues?**
Every day, individuals make decisions involving social and environmental issues. Many of these decisions are extremely complex and do not have clear answers. For example, buying locally grown vegetables may create local jobs but require more energy than vegetables flown in from elsewhere, and installing a wind farm may reduce carbon emissions but increase noise and costs in the short-term.
Past research has suggested that individuals make decisions by rationally comparing the options under consideration, weighing them against various criteria, then making tradeoffs and a decision. More recent research has shown that—even with simple decisions—biases often prevent such rational decision-making and that individuals use heuristics (rules of thumb) to decisions.

This project seeks to review and synthesize the existing knowledge on how individuals make decisions involving social or environmental issues. Insights may be drawn from the fields of behavioural economics and finance, behavioural decision theory, judgment decision making or others. The project may require answering the following related questions:

- What drives decisions? What heuristics are most important in how individuals make decisions? How are tradeoffs recognized, evaluated and ultimately made (consciously or more likely subconsciously)?
- In what ways are decisions involving social or environmental issues made differently (if at all) from other decisions?
- Are there differences across consumers, managers, investors and the general public?
- Based on the reviewed evidence, what can managers do to help individuals make more sustainable decisions?
  - How can social / environmental decisions be de-biased?
  - How can biases be used to facilitate social / environmental decisions (e.g., framing)?
  - What tools (e.g., websites, smart phone applications, info cards, etc.) exist to help individuals make social / environmental decisions?

*The project question will be refined and finalized through discussion between the successful research team, the Guidance Committee and the NBS (see Guide to NBS Systematic Reviews for a detailed description of the process).

4. Project Deliverables and Proposed Schedule

**Deliverables**

This project has one primary deliverable and several secondary deliverables.

- **The primary deliverable:** The primary deliverable for this project is a systematic review and synthesis of the most rigorous published and unpublished, academic and practitioner knowledge related to the Question. The target audience is ‘thinking practitioners’ and researchers. The body of evidence should be synthesized (see Guide to NBS Systematic Reviews for details). Gaps in the literature should be identified. Total length should be a minimum of 30 single-spaced pages plus appendices (methodology, systematic descriptive mapping of the body of knowledge, references, etc.). The deliverable must also include an executive summary written for CEOs that is a maximum of 2-pages.

- **Extracted data:** As an interim project deliverable, the data extracted from all sources will be submitted around the halfway point in the project. These are the raw data from which the project’s conclusions are drawn.

- **A public presentation (and slideshow):** You may be asked to present the review findings at an event. Your slideshow from this presentation will be made public and circulated widely.

- **An internal report for Network administrators:** We aim to improve the process every year by taking into account an internal report of your recommendations for improvements.

**Proposed Schedule**

The following table includes tentative deadlines for each of the deliverables and other key activities. The final schedule may be refined through discussion with the selected research team.
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<tr>
<th>Deliverables and Other Activities</th>
<th>Tentative Deadlines*</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Define research question on conference call with NBS and Guidance Committee.</td>
<td>January 2011</td>
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<td>2. Develop and justify the review methodology and get input from NBS and academic advisor.</td>
<td>February 2011</td>
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<td>3. Conduct literature search and apply eligibility criteria.</td>
<td>Feb-March 2011</td>
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<td>4. Give written progress report to NBS and Guidance Committee on conference call.</td>
<td>March 2011</td>
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<td>5. Read, analyze and assess quality of all studies in the review.</td>
<td>April-May 2011</td>
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<td>6. Submit written progress report and extracted data to NBS and Guidance Committee. Second installment will be released based on adequate progress.</td>
<td>May 2011</td>
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<td>7. Synthesize the review findings into a framework.</td>
<td>June 2011</td>
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<td>8. Discuss the emerging framework on a conference call with NBS and Guidance Committee.</td>
<td>Late June 2011</td>
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<td>9. Finalize synthesis, write report and submit first draft to NBS for review.</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
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<td>10. Discuss report on conference call with NBS and Guidance Committee.</td>
<td>July 2011</td>
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<td>11. Rework the report and submit it and all final deliverables to the NBS.</td>
<td>Sept. 1, 2011</td>
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<td>12. Present project findings at an event targeting practitioners.</td>
<td>Fall 2011</td>
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* May be negotiated with Guidance Committee and the Network.

All deliverables should be submitted in English in Microsoft Word formats.

5. Funding
The funding for this project is Cdn$25,000 including taxes, in unrestricted funds to be granted in three stages contingent upon progress. (Note that some universities deduct ‘overhead’ from all incoming funds.) The funds will be distributed according to the following schedule: $10,000 upon acceptance of the project, $5,000 upon delivery of the extracted data and contingent on adequate progress, and the balance upon successful completion. In addition, a travel supplement will be provided to cover travel and accommodation to events the lead researcher attends.

6. Eligibility
Anyone is eligible to respond to this Call. Interested applicants should bear in mind that to conduct a systematic review successfully requires strong capabilities with and extensive experience in conducting and reviewing academic research. We strongly encourage interested parties to contact us prior to applying to learn more about the process.

7. Proposal Requirements and Criteria for Evaluation
Proposals
The project will be conducted in English. All proposals and project deliverables must be written in English, and all oral communications throughout the project, including conference calls with the Guidance Committee, will be conducted in English.

Proposals must have one lead researcher, who is solely accountable for the deliverables and who is the main point of contact for the project. For training purposes, we encourage applicants to involve graduate students in the project. The research team may also include research associates and other partners.
Proposals should be limited to the following sections:

1. Impacts, Knowledge, and Activities (1,500 words max.)
   i. The envisioned impacts from the project. For example, who will be impacted by the knowledge? What they will do with it? Where you will publish the outputs? Etc.
   ii. Details of the body of knowledge that you feel are relevant to the Question and that you will synthesize. Applicants are encouraged to scope the existing literature briefly to inform their proposal content and scope.
   iii. A very rough, preliminary protocol for the project (see Guide to NBS Systematic Reviews for details).

2. Team Expertise (500 words per researcher max.)
   iv. Description of the specific experience and expertise of each team member as it relates to this project.
      It is important to show both that the research team has both the skills necessary to understand the academic research and those required to communicate knowledge effectively to practitioners.

3. A Curriculum Vitae for the lead researcher

Proposals must be submitted in Microsoft Word format to Tom Ewart (tewart@nbs.net) by December 1, 2010. Winning proposals will be announced within four weeks. Proposal may be made publicly available after the competition has closed.

Evaluation
Proposals will be evaluated by a Guidance Committee, comprised of selected members of the NBS Leadership Council. They will also help scope the project with the research team and guide them throughout the process.

The evaluation criteria are:
- Understanding of the project question and knowledge of the relevant literatures.
- Appropriateness of preliminary protocol.
- Ability to read and evaluate peer-reviewed academic research.
- Ability to communicate to practitioner audiences.