

The High Road Economy: Principles & Practices

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The High Road is an economic strategy that emphasizes high quality jobs, environmental sustainability, and broad access to opportunities for diverse businesses and workers. The High Road prioritizes a healthy economy and a healthy community. It ensures that public dollars result in both public good and economic growth, and that economic benefits are distributed equitably. The High Road Economy promotes democratic practices, the Triple Bottom Line (people, planet and profits), and innovative business structures. The following list captures the main principles and practices of the High Road.

A High Road Mantra:

“Reduce waste, add value,
capture and share the benefits
of doing both, repeat.”

-Center on Wisconsin Strategy

1. High Quality Jobs

- Living wage and benefits
- Good working conditions
- Prevailing wages and project labor agreements
- Employment security and stability
- Family-supportive employment practices

2. Skilled and Diverse Labor Force

- Workforce development and training programs
- Career ladder opportunities and flexible workplace practices
- Investments in labor as a valuable resource
- Expanded opportunities for historically disadvantaged workers

3. Competitive and Innovative Businesses

- Financial returns from high quality outputs, productivity and innovation
- Financial returns and other benefits from worker skills, talent and commitment
- Workforce stability and security
- Globally competitive through local ties
- Expanded opportunities for local and independently-owned businesses and women and minority-owned businesses
- Innovative business models such as worker-owned cooperatives and benefit corporations

4. Positive Employer-Employee Relationships

- Collective bargaining and employer neutrality
- Investment of union pension funds in local and responsible businesses
- Labor-management partnerships
- Effective workplace communication
- Adaptation and collaborative problem-solving for mutual gains (vs. control and conflict)
- Compensation linked to performance and knowledge

5. Efficient and Accountable Government

- Governments attract new business with high-skilled labor force and sophisticated infrastructure vs. wasteful tax abatements and subsidies
- Subsidies and tax abatements are targeted towards high road companies
- Development and incentive decisions are democratic and transparent, with ongoing corporate accountability
- Taxpayers benefit from the more efficient use of tax abatements and from worker self-sufficiency due to living wage jobs
- Public-private partnerships are used to advance the public good

6. Sustainability

- Economic efficiency through environmental efficiency
- Use of green design standards such as LEED, Energy Star, etc.
- Smart growth policies and re-use of existing infrastructure and buildings
- Energy independence through energy efficiency and use of renewables
- Decrease in waste and increase in recycling and reuse
- Water conservation and green infrastructure for stormwater management
- Promotion of public transit, biking, and walking
- Investment in environmentally innovative and sustainable businesses

7. Thriving Community and Society

- High emphasis on place-based, local economy and local workforce, and support for local, independently-owned businesses
- Community building through businesses located where workers are located
- Mutually beneficial partnerships between community members and businesses