

CASE STUDY

Attaining and leveraging Sustainability Excellence Associate (SEA) credentials at 3R Sustainability

OVERVIEW

As environmental issues escalate, the demand for ethical business practices increases, and the regulatory landscape changes, knowledge of core sustainability concepts and best practices is more important and valuable than ever. With the growing significance of sustainability, there is a rise in the number of applicants and hires in the sustainability field. There is a need for individuals to have a way to distinguish themselves from others and demonstrate competency in the fundamental concepts and practices of the rapidly evolving field of sustainability.

The International Society of Sustainability Professionals (ISSP) developed the Sustainability Excellence credential for those seeking credibility in their understanding of sustainability trends, concepts, and frameworks that will set them apart from other professionals*. There are two Sustainability Excellence credentials: Sustainability Excellence Associate (SEA) and Sustainability Excellence Professional (SEP). SEA is designed for those who are new to the field of sustainability, such as students, recent graduates, or professionals interested in incorporating sustainability into their work. SEP demonstrates advanced knowledge and experience in the sustainability field and is intended to recognize experts who are at the forefront of the transition to a more sustainable world. Individuals must have the SEA credential to be eligible for SEP.

3R Sustainability (3R) is a consultancy headquartered in Pittsburgh, PA, that delivers full-service sustainability solutions to clients to help them reach their material business goals. 3R highly values the professional growth of its employees; every employee is given ten hours per month dedicated to continuous learning and professional development. The Sustainability Excellence credential is a foundational component of 3R's professional development approach.

AT A GLANCE

Benefits

- Employees learned foundational sustainability concepts and strategies
- Built interpersonal relationships
- Gained shared knowledge
- Attained third-party verification of sustainability skills



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Gina MacIlwraith
3R Sustainability

*ISSP provides education to support exam preparation, credential maintenance, and professional development. Green Business Certification Inc. (GBCI) acquired the Sustainability Excellence credential in 2019 and is responsible for administering and delivering the certificates.

Not only are 3R Founder and President Jana Lake and Associate Director Gina MacIlwraith SEP certified, but over fifty 3R employees and interns have earned SEA designation in the past three years. Additionally, Gina has hosted seven study cohorts for 3R employees to help them prepare for the exam. 3R offers all interns a spot in the study cohort and reimburses interns for the credential exam fee.

“The cohort adds value to our internship. Not only do they gain work experience, but they can also obtain the SEA credential as part of their internship,” said Gina.

RESULTS

Gina, who has over two decades of experience in leading environmental, health, and safety efforts in the public and private sectors, said the SEA credential ensures that 3R team members have a consistent fundamental understanding of environmental, social, and governance (ESG) principles. The credential also enhances employee understanding of the history and philosophy of sustainability frameworks—something the 3R leadership believes is essential for success as a professional in the field of sustainability.

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The six SEA study cohorts led by Gina met weekly for an hour over the course of twelve weeks. The meetings went beyond reviewing SEA exam material—attendees participated in in-depth discussions about contemporary sustainability topics and practical application of sustainability frameworks. During these conversations, the study cohort built shared knowledge and common language to use when talking about sustainability. Ultimately, the skills and knowledge acquired through the study cohort discussions helped 3R employees better advise clients and better communicate with one another.

One fortuitous benefit of 3R’s SEA study cohorts is that they built interpersonal relationships amongst employees. This is notable because it can be difficult to foster interpersonal relationships between employees, especially when the staff is a mix of hybrid and remote workers who live across the United States, like 3R’s staff. The SEA study cohort cultivated an engaging environment for employees to connect with each other and bond over a common interest. Gina recalled that one study cohort bonded over mutual veneration of John Elkington—the author and entrepreneur who is seen

>50

3R employees earned the SEA credential

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Study cohorts were organized to prepare 3R employees for the SEA exam



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as the authority on corporate responsibility and sustainable development. (The cohort joked about getting John Elkington tattoos.)

At the conclusion of the SEA study cohorts, employees took the SEA exam either remotely or at a testing center. The exam consisted of seventy-five multiple choice questions focused on core sustainability concepts. Once the credential was earned, employees gained access to ISSSP's network of credential holders and added "SEA" to their post-nominal letters. The SEA designation provides 3R clients with third-party verification that 3R employees are competent in sustainability frameworks and practices.

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In sum, 3R leadership reported that their organization has benefited from supporting employees in obtaining the SEA credential. Employees learned foundational sustainability concepts and strategies, bonded with colleagues, gained shared knowledge and language to use in the workplace, and attained proof of their sustainability skill set that will signal credibility to clients. 3R will continue to require its employees to earn the SEA credential.

WANT TO LEARN MORE?

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