

THE BUCKMINSTER FULLER CHALLENGE

HOME ABOUT IDEA INDEX HOW TO ENTER SELECTION PROCESS JURY FELLOWSHIP PRIZE PRESS PARTNERS REFERENCE FAQ BFI

Guiding our economy to become part of nature

View

Edit

- You have an application to the BFI Challenge underway. [Click here to edit or submit it.](#)
- You have an application to the BFI Challenge underway. [Click here to edit or submit it.](#)
- Your application has been submitted. You can no longer edit the application. Click the print link at the bottom of the page to keep a copy.
- The *Application* has been updated.

Submitted by pfhenshaw on September 10, 2009 - 22:32.

Philip F Henshaw, HDS systems design science

The Team

Whose name (s) should be listed as winner(s) if your entry is selected?:

Philip F Henshaw

Application Questions

Summarize your Proposal:

Making economies part of nature. How natural system economies grow to integrate with their environments is by maturing rather than exhausting themselves as a limit to growth. It's a natural discovery of learning systems, using little energy, that human economies could replicate by mimicking natural economies, creating that choice.

Describe the critical need your solution addresses:

Our economic growth is not responsive to its limits, and so now multiplying costly conflicts, within itself and with its environments. They compete for inadequate resources for response. To resolve the impasse we could use nature's method of finishing her work, devoting the growth resources to perfecting the design.

Compare and contrast your initiative. **see full question below box:

The other methods for ending our growing impacts on the earth (such as by J. Jackson, G. Speth, H. Daly, etc. or using high technology or social networks to make small scale barter economies efficient, etc.) solve many symptoms but not the problem. This approach does not rely on super-technology or political control of the world. It relies on a contagious business self-interest in preserving our capital as it protects the parts of nature we rely on leaving uncontrolled. It solves the intrinsic problem of money. What is making our problems ever more unsolvable is the continuing "real growth" that multiplies our physical uses, and accelerating rearrangement, of everything on earth. It's not centrally a cultural problem, but physical one. We need nature's knowledge of physical solutions to see beyond the cultural confusions in our minds. We need nature's technique for guiding new forms of life to gracefully end their growth and integrate with their environments. Nature's economies that survive begin with self-investment growth, to start things, and mature with self-divestment growth to complete them, achieving balance as a new system reaches its peak of vitality. It is both more audacious and more feasible than other proposals.

Explain your initiative in more depth and its stage of development :

How natural systems that exchange services through markets grow and reach balance, has been a focus of my work since I discovered a new way to use [the physics of flows](#) to discover and anticipate the flowing reorganization that occurs in natural economies, 30 years ago. It's a series of questions about independently changing things, that leads to more and better questions, not formulas. I'm getting somewhat better at communicating it and have a number of significant findings, like why natural economies are self-animating, and [useful writings](#). Natural economies are self animating because they are learning systems with learning parts. Organisms are cells exchanging services through a blood stream, ecologies are plants, animals and people exchanging services through environments. A small business is an economy in its own right. The place of work is the medium of exchange between employees who each discover how to do their different parts in making the business work as a whole. The key insight for our economy achieving balance is one by J.M. Keynes, that others of the time called "[the fallacy](#)". It's that to preserve capital as our economy approaches natural limits there is a forced choice, either spending investment income as fast as it accumulates, or accumulating it until its earnings go to zero.

How does your strategy and approach respond creatively and comprehensively to key issues?

pfhenshaw

- [My account](#)
- [Log out](#)



» [Video About the Buckminster Fuller Challenge](#)
 » [Video About the Challenge Criteria](#)

For more information about the Challenge or the Buckminster Fuller Institute Please contact:

JenJoy Roybal
 Program Manager
 jroybal(at)bfi(dot)org
 718 290 9283

Elizabeth Thompson
 Executive Director
 et(at)bfi(dot)org
 718 290 9285

Facebook Fans



The Buckminster Fuller Challenge has



Carol McKai Andres Itai

The Buckminster Fuller Challenge on Facebook



The Buckminster Fuller Institute has 1



Helen Paul Carl

****see full question below box:**

What Keynes noticed was a difference between cultural reality and physical reality. He noticed we have no choice which one will break. So the key social, political and economic question is how to survive by breaking with some of our long held but unsustainable traditions. We'd preserve accumulated capital and our lasting traditions in the process, by becoming responsive to change in our environment as we change form. It's a learning process, of discovering which familiar "moral imperatives" actually need to be discarded as the economy weans itself from its seed resources and its immature habits, and develops its lasting resources and mature habits. It sort of means "unplugging capitalism" because it has finished its job of getting civilization started. It's a change not unlike being born, giving up the seed husk, or eggshell, or mother's womb that is left behind as a new organism begins the journey it takes on its own. So, in shaking our perceptions so thoroughly, how to be responsive to the way in which other people discover what it means, is important. What would tip the balance from everyone expecting to accumulate wealth by saving financial earnings, to spending financial earnings to save the earth, could be a critical mass of business and financial interests realizing that this is their best bet for preserving their wealth and interests, and starting to reject doing business with others. Any natural system change begins with a gestation period, then a growth spurt of accelerating changes, then resolving and completing by refinements. That's the same growth cycle we observe in anything that grows to last. Adapting our familiarity with how that works in familiar circumstances can help us become perceptive and responsive to the opportunities and necessities for change on the larger scale.

Describe your implementation plan. **see full question below box:

The plan is to initiate this larger societal learning process, starting in year 1 with the services for a learning network and then establishing a funding stream and production schedule for sponsored meetings and publications by year 3. The question is partly whether "the time is ripe". The impossibility of continuing as we are is becoming rapidly appreciated, though. The risk is treating it as a cultural matter, and continuing to deny the physical problem. It's a physical problem, that cultural change is needed to solve. If people discover why "peak strain on the earth" means "peak money" we'll learn better things to do with our surpluses, and the decision makers will go along. There's urgency in not going further on our unsustainable path. If a global realization develops perhaps an executive order could set the rapid wave of change in motion. The rule change that could do it might be rather simple, like redefining "fiduciary responsibility" to include the "whole interest of shareholders" in preserving the business environment, and not just "short term profits". It wouldn't actually take a change in the law, just correcting a major misunderstanding about the natural meaning of a word.

Provide details regarding the team and/or partners you have assembled. **see full question below box:

I would need funding for myself and one or two partners with writing/editing, networking/meeting, organizing/producing, funding/marketing skills. The venture capital is needed to lay the groundwork. We'd establish a web community and Wiki, write small grants and sponsor dialogs, meetings, newsletters, radio shows, small projects and articles, working to establish a working network of researchers and planners and a larger community awareness and interest. We could call it "Part of nature" Because one of the basic purposes is global capital preservation, part environmental protection and part cultural growth, providing resources for special interest groups from a core interdisciplinary community studying the issue would be important. The proposal draws on the general effort around the world to rethink our basic goals and strategies that has already begun, and would both take and give direction for that. To have opinions about how physical systems change, people would need to be led to study the natural systems developing all around them, to understand why nature starts systems with growth in scale and then ends the growth of the ones to survive by completing and integrating them with their surroundings.

What are the primary obstacles :

The main obstacle is needing to discuss the workings of natural physical systems with people only thinking of cultural issues. There are old habits of thought that no longer apply to the planet we have changed so drastically. The economic growth principle did multiply solutions once, before it started multiplying terminal problems, for example. Our cultural idea of growth seemed a permanent feature of nature. That exposes how detached our cultural ideas can be, and how unaware we are of our physical world. We missed the prominent signals of when getting bigger and bigger in relative terms would result in our getting "big" in absolute terms. It changes the physical meaning of all our external and many of our internal cultural relationships. Most institutions, government, finance, private savings, business, insurance and many familiar social relationships, all rely on endless growth as something permanent. We just never considered it important to adapt our culture to the earth, thinking the earth was something to adapt to our culture for so long.

What range of funding is needed to bring your project to fruition. **see full question below box:

I think it would start with a guarantee of office space for myself and a partner for three years, assuming the publicity of the prize leads to BFI or other significant organizational sponsorship, connections and funding for the project as it develops. Depending on the range of specific efforts to be funded approximately \$750k would be needed, to be released according to the detailed plan and designing the project and its milestones and the eventual budget.

10/30/2009

Guiding our economy to become part ...

- [Reference 2 \(required\)](#)

- [Images](#)

[Add new comment](#) [Printer-friendly version](#)

(categories: [economy and livelihood](#) [2010](#))

[HOME](#) [CONTACT US](#)

This is a program of [The Buckminster Fuller Institute](#) | 181 N11th St, Suite 402 | Brooklyn, NY 11211 | 718 290 9283 | [challenge \(at\) bfi \(dot\) org](mailto:challenge@bfi.org)