

How Higher Education Can Keep Pace with Growing Sustainability Aspirations

Lessons on Building a Better Plan, Setting Goals, and
Bolstering the Sustainability Organizational Structures

Blurred Boundaries Complicate Execution



Expanding Sustainability Scope Has Led to Campus Implementation Challenges

Challenge

Example



Institutions must pursue expanding array of sustainability initiatives to keep pace with scope creep



UN SDGs¹ include sweeping goals like Zero Hunger, Gender Equality, and Clean Water & Sanitation



Institutions set lofty, ambitious sustainability goals that are increasingly difficult to achieve



Stretton University² committed to diverting “at least 90 percent of waste from landfill”



Success across campus difficult to achieve with a small or siloed Sustainability Office



At one public research university, six sustainability staff are responsible for the 72K students, 17K staff, and 5K faculty members

1) UN Sustainable Development Goals.

2) Pseudonym.

Our Focus Today



How Higher Education Can Keep Pace with Growing Sustainability Aspirations

Prioritize Best-Fit Sustainability Initiatives on Campus

Lesson 1: Map Sustainability Initiatives to Institutional Priorities

Compendium of Sustainability Tactics in Higher Education

- Filter 1: Reduce Emissions and Environmental Footprint
- Filter 2: Advance Sustainability Research and Education
- Filter 3: Enhance Community Visibility
- Filter 4: Ensure Return On Investment

Organize Sustainability Plan Around End Goals

Lesson 2: Bolster Plans with Assessment and Reporting Systems

Lesson 3: Tailor Sustainability Goals to Unit-Level Leaders

Create a Coordinated Sustainability Organization

Lesson 4: Build Accountability Into Sustainability Governance Structures

Lesson 5: Form Structured Partnerships to Embed Initiatives Throughout the Institution

Lesson 6: Incentivize Campus Community to Pursue Sustainability Initiatives

Introducing EAB's Sustainability Compendium



Resource Outlines 100+ Sustainability Tactics

Guide to Choosing Institutional Best-Fit Sustainability Initiatives



Download the resource [here](#)

Delivering a Menu of Sustainability Initiatives

- ▶ **100+ sustainability tactics** categorized by relevant area and subcategory
- ▶ Organizational structure **mirroring STARS¹** sustainability areas
- ▶ Includes rationale for and **case studies** of each tactic
- ▶ Each tactic is **tagged by four filters** key to sustainability offices to indicate how the tactic advances **broader institutional goals**:

- 1 Reduce Emissions and Environmental Footprint
- 2 Advance Sustainability Research and Education
- 3 Enhance Community Visibility
- 4 Ensure Return On Investment

1) Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System.

Frameworks Ensure Plan Comprehensiveness

University of Miami Captures Wider Sustainability Definition Through STARS



2009 Climate Action Plan

Table of Contents Excerpt

Plan Category	Subsection(s)
Greenhouse Gas Inventory	Greenhouse Gas Baseline
Climate Action Plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Greenhouse Gas Reduction Proposal• Short Term Reduction Goal• Funding Possibilities for Reduction• Climate Education & Outreach• Climate Neutrality



2019 Sustainability Action Plan

Table of Contents Excerpt

Plan Category	Subsection(s)
Academics	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Curriculum• Research
Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Campus Engagement• Public Engagement
Operations <i>(Non-exhaustive list of subsections)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Air & Climate• Energy• Food & Dining• Transportation• Water
Planning and Administration	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Coordination and Planning• Diversity & Affordability• Wellbeing & Work

- Plan mainly comprised of generic emissions- and energy-focused sections
- Either neglects or minimally addresses areas outside of Facilities
- Ex: Approximately <5% of academic courses include sustainability components

- Plan organized according to four pillars of the STARS framework
- Tracks number of STARS credits achieved for each focus area and how that compares with peers' credits
- UM is Gold STARS rated and 18% of its courses address sustainability issues

A Roadmap to Building Sustainability Goals

Miami Works with Area Owners Across Campus to Form Institutional Targets

University of Miami's Goal Creation Process



SO meets with focus area leaders



Leaders agree on individual target



University sets sustainability plan goal

Example Goal Cascade

Sustainability Officer (SO) **meets with Energy System Managers and VP for Design and Construction** to establish realistic unit-level targets

Energy System Managers, VP for Design and Construction, and SO decide on an achievable **target of 5% reduction in electricity usage**

University sets energy reduction **goal of a 2% yearly reduction in MMBtu/GSF**, accounting for electricity subgoal



A Collaborative Process

UM established unit-level goals in collaboration with 30 individuals, including:



Department Chairs



Head of Landscaping



Head of Engineering



Select Faculty and Advisors



Head of Waste Management



Head of Maintenance

The Devil is in the Details



Colorado State Creates Accountability with Owner, Timeline, and KPIs¹

Excerpt from [CSU Sustainability Plan](#)

Strategy	Owner	Deadline	Measure of Success
Establish a sustainability research award.	Research Subcommittee, VPR Office	Spring 2020	Award given out.
Increase purchases qualifying for the Environmentally & Socially Responsible Procurement Policy (ESRP) to 25%.	Employee Names	Ongoing	Increased utilization of ESRP as measured by qualifying purchases
Formulate a strategy for infusing sustainability core knowledge into curriculum.	Teaching Subcommittee, Academic Assoc. Deans	2020	Number of department-level sustainability learning outcomes increased
Develop opportunities for CSU employees to learn about or be actively engaged with sustainability efforts.	Facilities Mgmt., Procurement Services, President's Sustainability Commission	Fall 2019-Ongoing	Documented participation in trainings, committees, etc.



Responsible agent identified by name or by group/committee

Pre-determined deadlines communicated for each target

KPIs identified for each target to measure and track success

1) Key Performance Indicators.

Systemize Oversight and Execution of Initiatives



Working Groups Focus Implementation of Wide-Ranging Plans

Northwestern University's sustainNU Working Groups [Strategic Sustainability Plan 2017-2021](#)



Plan Category	Working Group Chair(s)	Sample Responsibility
 Built Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dir. of Facilities Operations• Chair, Dept. of Earth Planetary Sciences	Acquire utility incentives and track projects for payment
 Transportation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Transportation Services Manager• Operations Specialist	Administer a campus-wide transportation survey
 Resource Conservation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Assoc. Dir. Of Sustainability• Dir. of University Food Services	Audit Procurement to identify waste reduction opportunities
 Communications & Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sustainability Communications Manager	Hold student sustainability roundtables
 Experiential Learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Dir. of Innovation & Engagement, Facilities Management	Identify experiential learning opportunities in existing courses

Measure and Report Progress

Northwestern's Multitiered Approach Tracks Progress, Creates Accountability



Northwestern
University

Northwestern University's Sustainability Governance Structure

sustainNU Working Groups

- Meet monthly to assess progress on respective initiatives
- **Report initiative progress quarterly** to Sustainability Council

Sustainability Council

- Leads and monitors implementation of Plan
- Prepares **annual working group progress reports** for the Sustainability Steering Committee
- Meets biannually at minimum

Sustainability Steering Committee




- Provides high-level oversight of sustainability strategy
- Releases **annual year-in-review reports** which outline progress made in each working group area

Not Always About the Money (But it Doesn't Hurt)



Students, Staff, and Faculty Motivated to Support Initiatives With Incentives

Effective Incentives Aligned by Institutional Stakeholder

	Motivators	Effective Incentives
 Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Professional development• Academic success	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Internships and mentorship programs• Academic and service credit
 Staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Department funding• Recognition	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Shared energy savings• Green office programs
 Faculty	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research support• Department funding• Additional classroom resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Research and program funding• Curricular training and support



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