CREATING A SUSTAINABILITY PLAN

Introduction

Ontario colleges understand that in order to see long-term drastic greenhouse gas emissions reductions, sustainability must be integrated into all functions; only when a collaborative, college-wide effort towards sustainability is pursued will emissions reductions follow, while also gaining added sustainability benefits. Integrated sustainability typically focuses on four main college functions: operations, curriculum, planning and administration, and engagement[1]. Institutions may name these categories differently or add others such as research, inclusivity, or culture depending on priorities.

This document outlines and summarizes, at a high level, recommended components of a Sustainability Plan with brief explanations and examples. The document assumes limited to no experience in sustainability planning. Recommended components are based on a review of all Canadian post-secondary instructions that have a published Sustainability Plan (listed below).

For those new to sustainability planning, the final plan should:

- Define sustainability and communicate the institutions sustainability vision to provide focus.
- Summarize how the sustainability vision will integrate into key institutional functions by providing information on the overall sustainability principles, priorities, strategies, goals, targets, and metrics.
- Improve credibility by defining expectations and demonstrating a serious commitment towards sustainability progress.

Recommended Sustainability Plan Components

Component	Purpose	Examples
Executive Summary	Summarizes the plans key details.	• See Sustainability Plan examples below.
Presidents Statement	Provides a positive welcome to the plan, demonstrates the link to the strategic plan, communicates the purpose for pursuing sustainability, increases the plans credibility, and provides motivation.	• See Sustainability Plan examples below.
Institutional Background	Provides the reader with context and scale of the plan.	• Relevant information may include: number of full and part time students, number of campuses and location to help provide scale of the plans, targets, and goals, programs and certificates offered relating to sustainability.
Sustainability Definition	Creating a definition of sustainability helps provide additional focus and context for the reader while helping communicate what the institution is striving to achieve.	• See document "Defining Sustainability in Canadian Higher Education".

Sustainability Vision	A vision focuses on what the institution wants to become, and the long-term direction for sustainability efforts[2]; it describes the future and sets the destination of what can be achieved through implementation of sustainability strategies.	• See Sustainability Plan examples below. • Refer to document "Creating a High-Level Sustainability Plan and Vision" for additional information on developing a vision statement.
Sustainability Initiatives	Brief the reader about work completed to date and progress made towards any sustainability-related targets already in place.	• Examples of information to include: emissions reduced to date, relevant partnerships, waste services such as: recycling, organics, and e-waste.
Principles	Sustainability plans may outline guiding principles or key themes that the institution is working towards regardless of goals, strategies, metrics, and progress.	• See Sustainability Plan examples below. • Examples may include: accountability, collaboration, communication, community, efficacy, engagement, innovation, transparency etc.
Consultation Process	Identify who was involved in plan development, what and how information was collected, and over what period.	• Stakeholders may include: the Sustainability Committee, subcommittees, and other relevant committees, senior decision makers, sustainability-related faculty, students, student association, external stakeholders (local government, NGOs, the surrounding community) etc. • Feedback may be collected by: surveys, community events, social media, class presentations, committee and senior level discussions (groups or one on one), newsletters, focus groups, direct email etc.
Goal (may also be called pillar/ outcome/ priority etc.)	Goals are slightly more specific and work to meet a long-term sustainability vision[3]. The consultation process should reveal sustainability-related areas of interest, with goals defined for each area[4].	• Example: reduce institutional-generated greenhouse gas emissions.
Goal Context	Additional information as to why the goal was developed to provide more context and transparency.	• Example: Greenhouse gases are emitted due to our offered programs and services. Stakeholders agree that the institution has a responsibility to reduce emissions and pursue carbon neutrality to ensure our graduates have a healthy environment in the future in order to thrive.
Strategies	Key practices and decision-making efforts that identify how to meet each goal.	• Examples include (for the goal of "reduce institutional-generate greenhouse gas emissions"): complete an annual emissions inventory including Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions, hire carbon manager to be primarily responsible for managing emissions and project management, investigate options for offsetting emissions.
Target	Defines how an institution will know a goal is achieved. Targets need to be SMART (Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, Timely).	• Example: achieve carbon neutrality (measured by net tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent) by 2050 vs 2015 baseline.

Conclusion	The conclusion should briefly summarize the report and present next steps.	• Example information to include: restating the purpose of the plan, communicating its importance, identifying how it fits into the greater strategy of the institution overall, next steps. Messaging should be positive and motivational.

Potential Challenges

• Learning curve as new planning skills are developed.

• Allotting time and organizing job roles to support and prioritize plan development.

• If necessary, money for consultant support.

Conclusion

A Sustainability Plan provides the needed structure and focus for moving sustainability progress forward and sets the tone and expectation for action. A well-developed plan supports the transition from commitment to action in all areas, functions, and services of the college to successfully integrate sustainability and subsequently reduce college-based emissions. The recommendations above are simply that and are not mandatory, but are meant to ease the process by providing structure. The links below are provided for reference to Canada's post-secondary sustainability plans for further planning support.

Canadian Post-Secondary Sustainability Plans

Brock University

Camosun College

Dawson College

Fleming College

Humber College

MacEwan University

McGill University

Mohawk College

Royal Roads University

Sheridan College

Simon Fraser University

University of Alberta

University of Calgary

University of Manitoba

University of Northern British Columbia

University of Regina

University of Saskatchewan

University of Toronto

University of Victoria

University of Waterloo

University of Winnipeg

Université Laval

UOIT

Vancouver Community College

Western University

York University

[1] Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education. (2017). STARS Technical Manual version 2.1, Administrative Update Three. http://www.aashe.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/STARS-2.1-Technical-Manual-Administrative-Update-Three.pdf

[2] McGill University, (2014). Vision 2020: A Sustainability Strategy for McGill University. Accessed from https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/v2020_ss_eng.pdf

[3] McGill University, (2014). Vision 2020: A Sustainability Strategy for McGill University. Accessed from https://www.mcgill.ca/sustainability/files/sustainability/v2020_ss_eng.pdf

[4] University of Ontario Institute of Technology, (2015). Strategic Sustainability Plan Phase 1. Accessed from https://shared.uoit.ca/shared/department/ocis/documents/strategic-sustainability-plan.pdf