

LAUNCHING AND IMPLEMENTING YOUR PLAN

Introduction

Once you have completed your sustainability and climate plans, it's time to shift towards building awareness, support, and the motivation for action. Creating reach is core to the success of your launch. Involving your sustainability committee, staff, senior leadership, students and supporters can help cast a wide net of awareness.

Do not underestimate the importance of a well thought-out launch. By introducing your plans effectively to its key audience groups, you will help increase institutional accountability and transparency. Unfortunately, without proper implementation, stagnation will happen. An intentional launch serves as a “feel good” achievement and the awareness created should stimulate team enthusiasm enough that members carry through on their action items and drive progress towards a sustainable future.

Your sustainability and climate plans have touched on implementation, including clearly identifying the key metrics and individuals responsible. This document extends further, by outlining potential tactics for launching and effectively implementing your plans to ensure your goals are met within their timeframes.

Launching Your Plan

Please keep in mind that the success of the sustainability launch depends on collaboration. Your unique plan has been developed by its participants and should be tailored to your community. Take pride and encourage everyone to be aware and engaged in the progress.

Consider that various audiences receive their information in differing ways. Your launch ought to use a variety of communication tactics, an omnichannel reach. For example:

- A [press or media](#) release (with the support of communications and public relations staff) to reach internal audiences and the broader community.
- Social media posts to reach students.
- Email announcements for staff, students, and faculty.
- Updating website to include the plan(s).
- Planning and engagement participant and group follow ups.
- Reaching out to [local newspaper](#) and [media sources](#).
- Speaking to students face to face, this can be done during key times when institutions may have “common hour” where student-facing services aggregate to engage students.
- Collaborating with partners and community groups who participated in feedback to support the launch via their newsletter, social media accounts etc.

Key Components to Implementation

Implementing a plan requires a multi-pronged approach that touches all areas, expertise, and levels of the institution. The following are examples of how those in key roles can help support an accelerated implementation:

The Role of Senior Leadership

Successful sustainability is much easier with proactive senior leadership. Proactive leaders understand the goal is to minimize negative impacts, maximize positive impacts, and find strategic ways to incorporate that thinking into the fabric of the institution. Leading a sustainability change with conviction is contagious, and acts as springboard to bring others along.

Senior Leadership can demonstrate commitment in several ways:

- Ensure sustainability is a priority of the institution by considering it a priority and including it within the overall strategic plan.
- Support STARS certification. The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System is a global sustainability standard. It is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance.
- Publicize commitments to sustainability, such as:
 - The Pan Canadian Protocol on Sustainability.
 - Working towards Canada's Greenest Employer.
 - Publicly committing and setting various sustainability-based targets.
- Direct integration of sustainability performance into corporate wide performance management system.
- Learn about Canada's commitment to the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, specifically the Government of Canada's priorities and programs centered on 17 Sustainable Development Goals.
- Providing the necessary resources and advocating for increased sustainability learning throughout academics.

The Role of Sustainability Staff

Staff are the central drivers for sustainability implementation, even though other institutional staff may have sustainability-related work built into their job description. Communication and collaboration, rather than project implementation, should be the long-term vision of a sustainability office.

Ideally, the sustainability office would be the touch-point for all areas of the institution to help guide each department's progress and incorporate sustainability as a whole. The first step toward this goal should be outlining the responsibilities in each department director's job description.

The Role of Plan Amendments and Engagement

Your institution's sustainability and climate plans are not static documents; they must be reviewed and amended to stay relevant. Ensure that the review terms are outlined and respected. Typically, plans are reviewed every two years to evaluate performance and stakeholder interests, and plan renewals occur every five years. Align planning and reassessments with consideration to the institutions strategic plan, the campus master plan and business development plan etc.

Reviews should identify any changes in priorities due to provincial or sector interests. The Sustainability Committee and relevant subcommittees should collaborate to identify new audiences of interest, evaluate plan successes, and aspects that need improving.

As well, student engagement is important, so always involve students. All services and programs are for them, and their opinions and values have enormous influence. Well-informed student advocates can answer questions and educate community members, as well as debunk tired myths. Staff members are important too, as they typically have a longer term than students and can provide important big picture feedback. Staff members can act as sustainability champions by communicating with students and circulating expectations.

The Role of Collaboration and Key Resources

Permanent sustainability staff is a necessity, and like any other office or department, that means dedicated funds for full time, permanent staff. Many sustainability offices within post-secondary institutions are composed of a full time manager, 1-2 employees, and students. Ideally, a sustainability office would be comprised of a manager to create relationships and strategy, a coordinator to support implementation, and a communications employee.

Student contracts should always be considered. Working with students is a great way to improve communications and engagement with a key target audience. This can be in the form of student volunteers, co-op, or even student contracts supplemented by employment programs, such as a wage subsidy for a project that reduces your institution's environmental footprint or increases sustainability.

A key resource is secure funding for project implementation, to help support and achieve your sustainability targets. This funding may come from an allotted annual budget, small student fees built into tuition, energy savings, partnerships, or a combination of options.

Sustainability project funding can be a challenge, especially when the return on investment is not strictly quantitative. Due to continual fluctuations and changes in educational budgets, it's important to always consider other pathways towards progress that demonstrate innovation and partnerships (a senior leadership interest). Partnerships may include; utility programs, private-public partnerships, or working with local community partners on sustainability-related initiatives.

Team up with your municipality, as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities offers grants for municipal environmental projects. The FCM has various funding opportunities, from plans and studies, to pilots, capital projects and more. One of their programs, the Green Municipal Fund, helps fund creative solutions to municipal environmental issues. The goal is to develop sustainable ways to reduce your community's energy use and improve its air, water and soil quality.

Potential Challenges

- The learning curve associated with formally launching your plan, so be sure to reach out to your communications team and public relations for support.
- Working to create and present a case for additional sustainability staff. This is a great opportunity to speak with other post-secondary institutions that have gone through this process and employ multiple sustainability staff members.
- The time required to research various funding opportunities for sustainability, including the reporting and restrictions as they relate to the available funding options.

Conclusion

In essence, launching and implementing a sustainability initiative is concentrated upon driving awareness and taking action. Effective progress cannot be made without both factors and they are not static. Your sustainability and climate plans should be considered living documents with a framework for reviews and amendments.

By outlining the key areas to properly implementing a plan, your team will ensure all areas and levels of the institution are involved. The sustainability launch can be leveraged to gain public awareness, support, and motivation. Gaining traction will help maintain interest and support from the larger community. Remember, communication and collaboration is pivotal! A lot of work has gone into the creation of your plans, and you should take pride in them and share the initiatives, because it is a positive, and ongoing, story that others will want to know about.