

STEP 6 Develop Your Implementation Plan

It's all talk unless there is an implementation plan to make it all happen. Who is going to do what? By when? How will you assess effectiveness? After finishing this section, you will have:

- A plan to develop the proper support systems around your strategies
- An implementation plan to ensure clear responsibilities, timelines, and budgets

Establishing Support Systems

DON'T SKIP THIS STEP. You would not build a house on a faulty foundation. Beneath your new sustainability plan, you need a strong foundation of support systems. Without such a foundation, your investment to create a solid plan (Steps 1-6) could be at risk.

“Support systems” refers to the various administrative structures, policies, and communications that focus and build capacity within an organization to carry out the work. These are the key enablers of your sustainability plan. If you leave sustainability unresourced, isolated, and without accountability, it will wither. *On the other hand, if sustainability has a prominent seat at the table, is an obvious and visible part of the organizational structure and culture, and is properly resourced, it will succeed.*



This is where you consider and make decisions about questions like:

- Have formal structures been put into place like a sustainability working group or committee with representatives from various departments?
- What new policies, systems, or standards may be needed or old ones amended to support your sustainability goals?

Tip for the Facilitator

Once you have your strategies and metrics finalized, put them in writing in a document underneath the vision statement. Show this to the group to demonstrate that progress is being made. It is recommended that someone draft an implementation plan or at minimum an outline. Bring a drafted plan to a meeting and do a simple “plus/delta.” “Pluses” are the document’s strengths and “deltas” are opportunities to make it even better. Be sure to get formal approval from your top leadership.

Above and beyond: Schedule quarterly meetings to monitor implementation and make sure it is on the calendar of all the main people responsible for different strategies. Have the appropriate unit leader present at these meetings so she/he is kept informed of progress.

- Whose support inside and outside the organization will we need to be successful? And how will we make sure they are aware and “on board” with our sustainability goals?

These critical questions will be answered by addressing four parts of your support system:

- Organizational structure and policies
- Team learning and innovation
- Communications
- Reporting and accountability

Organizational Structure and Policies: the Right People

Your unit surely has a number of committees, councils, advisory boards, task forces, etc. that have various responsibilities. These groups have regular meetings and key topics they analyze, discuss, and make decisions or recommendations about. The key issue here is how sustainability will be built into this organizational structure.

Effective approaches that some units have taken include:

- On an existing committee, create a chairperson for sustainability who reports on progress, identifies obstacles, and convenes conversations when needed.
- On an existing committee, create a subcommittee focused on sustainability.

- Create a new committee focused on strategic sustainability in your unit, such as a group of faculty teaching sustainability or conducting research in this area.
- Create a new position or role in your unit for someone to focus on strategic sustainability (if you already have a diversity representative or champion, for example, the idea is similar).
- Create an external or internal advisory board of faculty from other colleges or universities or from industry that can advise your focus on strategic sustainability.

Units have a number of formal and informal policies, standards, and norms—some from the unit and some originating from the university. These can support, impede, or not apply to your new sustainability plan. For example, promotion and tenure criteria may inadvertently discourage applied sustainability research. Faculty may not get credit for applied projects that may provide sound learning outcomes and benefit to the community or campus but don't satisfy a peer-reviewed publication or "service to the university" requirement. On the other hand, the same promotion and tenure criteria can actually advance sustainability research by ensuring its rigor and grounding in scientific principles.

How does our Green Team play a role?

It depends on your unit and your goals. In general, we say that Green Teams play the critical role of improving day-to-day operations. Strategic planning is focused on longer term initiatives tied to the unit's core mission. Both are needed.

What are Green Teams?

Penn State Green Teams are groups of faculty, staff, and students who take specific actions to help their organization (college, department, building, etc.) operate in a more efficient, innovative, and healthy way. Penn State has Green Teams at nearly every campus. Learn more at our website: sustainability.psu.edu

Team Learning and Innovation: the Right Understanding and Creative Environment

Your unit already has a way to ensure that faculty and staff receive instruction or training on various topics, from managing TAs to using technology to leadership and communication skills. Sustainability also requires new skills, knowledge, and values. The specific type and content of faculty or professional development depends on the unit and your sustainability goals.

Examine your goals and consider the skills and knowledge required to realize them. Do those skills and knowledge exist within the people who are responsible for implementing the plan? If so, how could they be enhanced? If not, how could they be acquired? What resources exist in the college, campus, or at Penn State that could help?

Sometimes it is not necessarily skills and knowledge that is needed but partnerships and space for reflection and innovation. Perhaps one or more of your goals will require new partnerships with faculty or staff in other areas, groups in the community, or external agencies, businesses, or organizations.

What if you had a meeting of faculty, dining service employees, local farmers, and social workers to explore ways to develop a local food program that provided nutrition to low-income populations while providing learning and research opportunities for students?

What if you had monthly Innovation Labs, where faculty or staff met during an afternoon or morning about a strategic sustainability topic? Using brainstorming, small group work, and personal reflection, all types of new ideas and process improvements would emerge.

Communications: the Right Message and a Way to Listen

Your unit probably has a number of ways for communicating information: website, social media, fundraising letters and meetings, alumni newsletters, emails, bulletin boards, meetings, and special events. *Consider how your new sustainability goals and commitment can be featured and highlighted regularly in these communications.*

Some general communication tips for sustainability:

- Communications includes listening to internal and external stakeholders via meetings, surveys, etc.
- Work with your leadership to determine the key messages and types of communication you want to incorporate into your traditional communications.

Be able to fill in the blank: “The most important message (name of leader) wants to communicate about sustainability is

_____.”

Note that she/he may have a slightly different message for different audiences, so be sure to list messages by audience. The message to students could and should be a little different from the message to staff or faculty or alumni.

- Keep finding fresh, positive new ways to communicate this message.
- Always relate the stories to the unit’s core mission and priorities.
- Be sure to show the breadth of what sustainability represents: social, economic and environmental dimensions.

Evaluation, Reporting & Accountability Processes: *the Right Measurement*

Your unit already has a regular schedule and process to gather quantitative and qualitative data in a number of areas: research publications, student learning, customers served, project costs, etc. And you have a way to share this information internally and externally.

How will you incorporate sustainability into these existing measurement and reporting processes?

To ensure long-term support and success, you will need to be able to make a rigorous, evidence-based case for the unit’s strategic sustainability efforts. Be prepared for this kind of critical analysis by putting in place a program evaluation plan at the outset. Return to Step 5, “Set Goals and Develop Metrics,” and develop your evaluation plan using the metrics you developed.



Image: Marissa Carney

Worksheet



Support Systems Checklist

Check off the following once you have ensured that these critical support systems are in place to support the realization of your goals.

Organizational Structure and Policies

You have decided how sustainability will be built into your organizational structure, decision-making processes, and policies.

Team Learning and Innovation

You have decided what system you will put into place to ensure team learning, reflection, and focus on innovation.

Communications

You have a communications plan to ensure sustainability and the various strategic initiatives put into place are an important part of your leadership's message and the unit's communications. Likewise, you have a plan to listen regularly to the needs and concerns of key stakeholders.

Evaluation, Reporting and Accountability

You have decided how you will incorporate sustainability into new or existing measurement and reporting processes and schedules.

Worksheet

Implementation Template

Here is where you put it all together. Ensure that each strategy has someone capable who is responsible for getting it done within a certain timeframe.

Your unit probably has its own way of developing implementation plans or action plans. Some methods are more formal than others. The “template” below can be

recreated in Excel or a similar program. Likewise, the same categories could be created in a Word document. The most important thing is to have these categories accounted for because they force you to be clear and specific about how you will carry out your goals.

Goal	Objectives w/Action Steps	Who	Timeframe	Metric	Budget



Go back to page 5 and write your conclusions in Step 6.