



Writing a Sustainability Plan

A sustainability plan is a detailed write-up that describes the actions you'll take to make your organization more environmentally sustainable. Sustainability plans are structured like business plans, but instead of breaking down your business viability and growth strategy, you're explaining your sustainability initiatives and their impact on the environment and your operation.

What's the purpose of writing a sustainability plan?

Writing a sustainability plan is a key part of a successful transition to running a more sustainable operation. Taking time to clarify your goals and assess your capabilities can help you reach your objectives more easily—and recognize when to change course if your plan isn't working.

Through the process of writing a sustainability plan, you'll gather a lot of valuable information, including which sustainability initiatives have the greatest environmental impact, which ones

are the easiest or most complicated to carry out, and what your financial investment will look like.

The most common reason for writing a sustainability plan is to create a roadmap for building a more eco-conscious facility (or facilities), but you might also need a sustainability plan to:

- Appeal to key stakeholders, like investors
- Enhance fundraising initiatives
- Educate employees about new sustainability programs you're implementing
- Get buy-in from your suppliers about making sustainable changes together
- Apply for a grant

Who writes a sustainability plan?

Theatre administrators should be heavily involved in writing a sustainability plan, but developing it will likely be a collaborative effort. You might want to ask managers, senior staff and board members to weigh in during the process or help contribute research, strategies, and financial analysis.

Who reads a sustainability plan?

At minimum, your staff and board should all read the finished sustainability plan so everyone is on the same page. If you need their support to accomplish your sustainability initiatives, consider giving them a high-level overview of the sustainability plan, too.

You may also want to give the plan to your business attorney or accountant for feedback, as well as major donors, if you have them. If you want to involve your suppliers in sustainable changes or apply for financing to execute your eco-friendly initiatives, vendors and business lenders could also end up reading your sustainability plan.

What's in a sustainability plan?

Every sustainability plan should include an explanation of the sustainable change you're making and why, the desired outcomes, the estimated environmental impact, the steps you'll take to implement the change, and the financial resources required.

Depending on your goals and prior experience with sustainability efforts, your sustainability plan could be a high-level, one-page brief, *or* a comprehensive multi-page document. There's no wrong way to write a sustainability plan, but the most thorough plans will include the following sections:

- Sustainability goals
- Sustainability practices and strategies

- Milestones and measurements
- Resources
- Challenges
- Finances

First things first

Before you jump into your sustainability plan, carve out time for some background research, so you have a better idea of what to prioritize in your write-up. Some of the simplest ways to go green include:

- **Energy Efficiency:** Invest in energy-efficient technologies and practices, including upgrading to energy-efficient lighting and appliances, using renewable energy sources, and participating in local community energy-saving initiatives.
- **Waste Reduction:** Implement programs to reduce waste, including recycling, composting, and minimizing single-use plastics.
- **Sustainable Sourcing:** Prioritize purchasing products and services from sustainable and ethical suppliers.
- **Cleaning and Maintenance:** Use environmentally friendly cleaning products and practices for facility maintenance.

Taking a deeper dive, the topics below can help lay the foundation for your organization's specific sustainable goals:

- **Industry practices and competition:** Find out what entertainment venues in your area or stage has any best business practices for sustainability (like energy consumption limits), then research what they have done.
- **Environmental regulations and laws:** Look into federal, state, and local sustainability regulations to see which ones apply to your organization and what it takes to be compliant. You can [view federal regulations here](#), then [search your state here](#).
- **Local environmental considerations:** It's a good idea to have a solid understanding of the environmental issues that affect your local community, whether it's a climate-related natural disaster or an ongoing concern like pollution or water contamination.
- **Consumer interests:** Research your customer-demographic's attitude toward environmental issues and sustainable product. A survey may reveal which issues are most (and least) important to them, and how you might craft a message to your audiences that resonates with local concerns.

Six Steps to Success

Once you're armed with more knowledge, take the following steps:

Step 1: Refine your goals

The first step in your sustainability plan is figuring out what you want to achieve. Your sustainability goals should reflect the problem you want to help solve on a global, local *and* business-specific level. That means you have to account for the environmental impact of your ideas, as well as how realistic they are to bring to life.

When brainstorming and setting your goals, consider:

- **Where you're starting from** → What sustainable practices do you already have, if any?
- **What resources you have to achieve your goals** → How much money and people-power can you devote to your sustainability strategy without disrupting operations or lowering revenue?
- **What would create the greatest impact** → Which initiatives, if any, have the power to improve the environment *and* your organization as a whole?

Maybe you'll aim to cut your energy usage in half within the next two years, or work to implement eco-friendly policies, help educate the public, and collaborate with other organizations.

It's okay if your sustainability goals are fairly broad in this section; you'll break down the processes behind them in the next section.

Step 2: Describe your sustainable practices and strategies

The second step is to explain the sustainable practices or programs you want to implement. For each sustainability initiative, it's crucial to explain what you're currently doing, what you hope to achieve, and what steps you need to take to get there.

Step 3: Choose your milestones and metrics

After you break down your sustainability goals, practices, and steps, it's time to choose which benchmarks and key performance indicators (KPIs) you'll use to track progress and measure success.

Make sure you describe what success looks like at each milestone for each sustainability goal, whether it's adhering to a strict timeline for tasks, having specific deliverables in your hand, or meeting certain KPIs.

Step 4: List the resources you'll need

The resources section is a comprehensive breakdown of everything you'll need to execute your sustainability goals. You can include a description of cash flow or financing needs here, but you'll have more space to dig into the numbers in the finances section.

Instead, use this section to detail all *non-monetary* resources, including:

- Time on the calendar
- Staff & board support
- Volunteers
- Research and development time
- External consultants
- Technology
- Appliances, machinery, or equipment

For each resource listed, answer the following questions:

- Do we have this resource already?
- If not, how and where will we obtain it?
- What's the process to get this resource in place?
- What does it look like to maximize this resource for success?

Your responses will help guide the first stage of your sustainability plan implementation: laying the groundwork to get results. You'll be able to determine what you need in place before executing your sustainability goals, and how much effort and time each task will take.

Step 5: Consider the challenges you'll face

Use the challenges section to imagine the roadblocks you'll encounter along the way to a more sustainable operation—and brainstorm solutions to move past them. Obstacles can include everything from costs and supply chain disruptions to consumer opinion and competing priorities.

For each challenge you describe, include the following information:

- Potential negative ramifications to your organization
- Relevant research or data explaining the likelihood of encountering the particular challenge
- Actionable steps you can take now to prevent the challenge and/or minimize your risk
- A response plan that explains what to do should certain situations arise

Step 6: Analyze your finances

The finance section of your sustainability plan is where you crunch the numbers to determine whether or not your sustainability plan is financially viable. You need to figure out how to balance your investment in sustainability with your bottom line and other growth initiatives.

Start this section by sharing an updated picture of your organization's revenue sources, cash flow, and balance sheet. Include any screenshots of your recent financial statements, as well as insight into your revenue forecasts for the next 12 months.

Then, include the following estimates for each sustainability initiative included in the plan:

- Total cost, including upfront spending and ongoing expenses
- Potential cost savings in the short and long term
- Potential ROI/revenue growth in the short and long term
- Potential tax offsets
- Financing needed, if any

If you need support rounding out this section and ensuring accuracy, don't hesitate to consult a business accountant for input and advice.

What's next after you write a sustainability plan?

After you write a draft of your sustainability plan, you might want to run it by one or two trusted peers or mentors who've successfully adopted sustainable practices—or hire a business sustainability consultant to get expert feedback.

Once you're confident about your plan, it's time to take action. Just remember: good plans are structured and well thought out, but they should also be fluid. Don't be afraid to revisit your plan and pivot if you need to.