



Sustainability Planning Guide

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This sustainability planning guide has been developed by the Ethos Foundation, Project Manager and Administrator for the Building Sustainable Small Business (BSSB) in the Scenic Rim Region, Queensland..

Ethos Foundation Contact Details:

Phone: (07) 3040 3035

Email: info@ethosfoundation.org or info@bssb.org.au

Website: www.ethosfoundation.org or www.bssb.org.au

Contact Person: Jan McGregor

Introduction

As green goes mainstream, many small to medium business enterprises, organisations and even households and communities are looking for information and guidance about how they can become more sustainable. The most important thing to remember is that sustainability is a journey – an unfolding of real life learning, thinking and action that evolves over time. There is no ultimate sustainability destination although there are some significant milestones to head for along the sustainability pathway.

In essence, sustainability is all about meeting the needs (not greed) of present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs. There are limits imposed within sustainability because the foundation that underpins life on earth, human society, the economy and business is the ability of the Earth to function effectively – functioning air and water cycles, healthy soil, the flow of sunlight energy, biodiversity and complex interconnections. The Earth also needs to be able to absorb the effects of human activities while continuing to function effectively. These are the Earth's natural limits that can and do impose limits on human activities.

Currently there are four key pillars to sustainability:

1. Ecological sustainability – ensuring human activities do not compromise environmental functions and if possible, also help to restore and give back to the Earth
2. Economic sustainability – ensuring human activities are economically and financially sustainable as well as equitable, fair and accessible to all
3. Social sustainability – ensuring social systems, the relationships between people, are healthy, functioning, just and fair
4. Cultural sustainability – recognition that within human systems and relationships, the way we live is vital. That creativity, imagination, innovation, history and heritage are integrated within our social systems and relationships.

Sustainability for people, organisations and communities is also about integrated, systems or joined-up thinking. In the past we've tended to separate our thinking and actions into separate boxes but increasingly what's most important in our sustainability efforts is that there is connection, flow, integration, big picture thinking and joining up.

This sustainability planning guide aims to help people, enterprises, organisations and communities of people to develop an integrated and coherent sustainability plan for their own circumstances. It sets out the basics that can be adapted for your own situation and organisation.

This guide has been greatly informed by numerous thinkers, authors, practitioners and organisations. Of particular assistance has been Ecotourism Australia's sustainability accreditation criteria which includes business and marketing planning ideas.

Summary of Key Sustainability Components

1. Cultural core – describe what is at the heart of your organisation and what your core values are
2. Create and word your overarching vision – why sustainability is important to you and how it links with your cultural core
3. Current status – describe where you're at within the sustainability journey – what have you already implemented
4. Your sustainability pathway – set out the sustainability stepping stones you are aiming for and how and when you aim to reach those points.

Note, in conjunction with developing a sustainability plan for a business or enterprise, it is highly recommended that a business plan be developed or updated. Even better, you may want to explore how to interweave your enterprise's business and sustainability plans to ensure the best possible fit between these essential business documents. For more information about designing a business or enterprise plan, please see Appendix 1 in the BSSB Toolkit of Resources.

Detailed Sustainability Plan Components

1. *Cultural Core: Describe what is at the heart of your organisation and what your core values and principles are:*

- If your organisation could be described in a metaphor (as a garden, a tree, a person, something mechanical etc) what would that metaphor be and how would that metaphor paint a clear picture of what your organisation stands for, what it does, how it functions, what is at the heart of it?
- What are the core values and principles that underpin your organisation?
- What are your own core values?
- What are the links and synergies between your own core values and those of your organisation? Are there gaps? If so, how might the gaps be bridged?
- What does your organisation do to create a living culture that reflects its core values and principles?
- Are there gaps between the values and principles your organisation talks about (espouses) and the way it actually lives or actions these values? If so, where are these gaps and how might they be filled or bridged to ensure the organisation walks its talk?

2. *Overarching Sustainability Vision: create and word your overarching sustainability vision – why sustainability is important to you and how it links with your cultural core. Some questions that might help you develop and word your sustainability vision include:*

- What are the drivers for change on your doorstep and coming down the line for you? This might include external threats and challenges such as climate change, water scarcity and peak oil as well as changing government regulations and priorities that will impact on you.
- Why is sustainability important for you and your organisation – how and where does it link with your core values and principles?
- What are the likely benefits to your organisation if you proactively address sustainability? These might include:
 - greater alignment of values, principles and practices
 - cost stabilisation or cost savings
 - ability to work effectively with a shrinking resource base (eg) water scarcity
 - ability to access incentives, rebates and grants
 - ability to comply with government regulations and priorities
 - ability to access new customers and markets
 - ability to meet changing customer needs and expectations
 - creation of new services and products for current or emerging markets
 - new business opportunities
 - preparation for meeting emerging external threats and challenges and turning these into opportunities

3. *Current status – describe where you're at within the sustainability journey – what have you already implemented:*

It's important to notice and document what you've already done within your sustainability journey. Have you already been gathering information, planning, measuring/monitoring, implementing behaviour changes and installing equipment? You may be surprised to realise that you've already started the sustainability journey...

4. *Your sustainability pathway – set out the sustainability stepping stones you are aiming for and how and when you aim to reach those points:*

There are many possibilities for your sustainability pathway. These are just some of the things you might want to explore and include.

4.1 Information gathering and research:

Identify where your information and knowledge gaps are and start to research the areas you need to know more about. An important information process to begin with is to identify what your eco-footprint actually is and what can be done to lighten it. This can be done in a number of ways from accessing free online calculators for households through to extensive specialist auditing by highly-trained consultants for large businesses or organisations. It is suggested that you begin to explore some of the websites that specialise in these services (see BSSB Toolkit of Resources for links).

4.2 Hard infrastructure and built environment:

- 4.2.1 Built environment – new buildings can be designed and constructed according to environmental best practice and existing buildings and infrastructure can be retrofitted to incorporate environmental best practices, equipment and appliances.
- 4.2.2 A huge range of sustainable equipment and technology is available for households right through to large commercial businesses (eg) solar energy (photovoltaic) panels, wastewater treatment infrastructure etc

These innovations usually require upfront financial investment but it is possible to calculate your payback on investment and estimate how much money you will save on operational costs and over what period of time this investment will be recouped. There are simple calculation tools that can be found on many websites.

4.3 Resource Use and Management:

- 4.3.1 Review and monitor your use of resources. Identify where your highest resource use and costs are – your 'hot spots' so you can focus your attention on minimising pain and maximising financial gain or cost stabilisation.
 - (a) meter/measure your water and electricity use as soon as possible so you have a starting point for comparing changes in resources use over time. This might be as simple as keeping water or electricity bills and

comparing before and after use data over a period of time. It might also be more useful to read your water or electricity meters on a regular basis and record and compare the data yourself.

(b) ensure you are complying with resource management regulations (eg pollution control, safe chemical use (look to completely phase out chemical use over time), trade waste regulations etc

- 4.3.2 Reduce your resource use (eg) minimise and reduce electricity use, reduce potable/drinking water use, reduce the packaging on goods you purchase and therefore reduce your waste, reduce your car use
- 4.3.3 Reuse your resources (eg) set up composting systems so organic 'waste' is transformed into a resource for your garden; capture and treat your wastewater appropriately so it can be reused to irrigate your garden or to flush toilets
- 4.3.4 Install or buy renewable resources (eg) switch to green/renewable electricity providers; install solar hot water or renewable energy systems; install gas appliances where appropriate and timely (stoves, heaters etc)

Some of these initiatives require an upfront financial investment (eg) installing solar equipment or wastewater treatment equipment. This can be carefully planned and timed to coincide with dollar savings you make through reducing your resource use and/or waiting until your old equipment and appliances need replacing. You can also calculate your return on investment (dollars and timing) in equipment and appliances and there are a number of online calculators that can assist you with this.

However, many of these initiatives can be carried out without incurring any upfront costs – reducing your electricity and water usage through behaviour changes, for example, costs nothing. And the financial savings you make by manually reducing your consumption can then contribute to the purchase of resource-saving equipment.

5. Sustainable Culture

- Create a sustainability culture within your organisation that's long-term, self-sustaining, and focused on continually learning and improving.
- Celebrate your successes and milestones
- Integration, cohesion, synergies – look for the links, the cross-overs, the benefits that can arise from weaving together different people and sections together
- Professional development and learning for everyone

- Accreditation under a relevant sustainability program, eg ISO 14000, Ecotourism, Organic or Biodynamic farming etc

6. Community Interface

- Employ local residents
- Purchase goods and services locally
- Support local initiatives – financially and in kind,
- Help to revitalise your local economy – food, farmers, products, services – by prioritising your involvement and participation in the local economy
- Review the community and region and identify what the emerging sustainability opportunities and gaps are which you can help fill or support – where are the gaps, synergies and networks you can address in your circle of influence?
- Network and collaborate with your colleagues, peers and even competitors to increase the awareness of sustainability

Draft Sustainability Plan Example – Eco-Tourism Accommodation Enterprise

1. Cultural core – describe what is at the heart of your organisation and what your core values are:

- Providing access to natural environments and our living local community for guests and visitors
- A homely, welcoming and warm lodge
- People are at the heart of our enterprise
- Local community relationships and interface are vital
- Informal and ongoing education and learning for guests
- Continual improvement and lifelong learning for our staff
- Our lodge has the lightest of ecological footprints
- We provide retreat, restoration and relaxation for our guests
- Compliance with all government environmental regulations
- Compliance with all relevant government regulations (eg) workplace health and safety etc
- Leadership and collaboration within our industry and region

Notes:

2. *Create and word your overarching vision – why sustainability is important to you and how it links with your cultural core:*

- Sustainability is a priority for government and the tourism industry
- Our market of current and potential guests are increasingly asking about sustainability and wanting to lighten their own eco-footprints and live their values
- Our local community has a high level of expertise in environmental action and sustainability and is an important resource for the enterprise
- Emerging threats and challenges will impact on our enterprise – climate change, peak oil, water scarcity – and we need to proactively turn these threats into opportunities
- Grants and incentives increasingly available for sustainability initiatives and infrastructure for ecotourism enterprises
- Need to reduce resource use costs (eg) electricity costs are a high pain area of the lodge's budget and can be reduced

Notes:

3. *Current status – describe where you're at within the sustainability journey – what you have already implemented:*

- Skylights in communal areas and guest bungalows (reducing electricity because lights are used less)
- Rainwater tanks for potable/drinking water
- Water and wastewater infrastructure to enable treated wastewater to be used where appropriate (eg) gardens and for toilet flushing
- Predominantly native gardens that attract birdlife and are attractive for guests. Also very waterwise and require reduced irrigation
- Experiments with a lodge vegie garden and worm farm that can be developed into ongoing selling points for the lodge as well as supply some of our produce requirements
- Preliminary creation of guest education that can be grown into an ongoing program
- Integration of indigenous cultural heritage interpretation has begun and can be expanded
- Strong enterprise values and culture that can be expanded to include sustainability if desired

Notes:

4. *Your sustainability pathway – set out the sustainability stepping stones you are aiming for and when you aim to reach those points (note, these actions need to include information about when they will be implemented and who will be responsible for implementing them):*

- Measure or audit our current resource use – electricity, water, other energy including oil and fuel – with a view to reducing resource use and maximising efficiencies and cost savings
- Review our operational product use – type of products and amount of use – with an aim to transition to non-toxic, biodegradable products, reduction in packaging and overall reduce inputs
- Review our waste systems – with a view to reducing consumption and packaging, reusing resources, recycling and creating a no-waste closed system. Look towards composting systems, no packaging, no export of waste offsite
- Collaboratively design a sustainability plan for the lodge with staff and even input from guests
- Embed sustainability within the lodge’s activities, operation, culture and values – need to identify links and pathways so connections and synergies are created
- Measure and monitor electricity and petrol use
- Electricity minimisation
 - * fully implement energy reduction behaviour program
 - * identify savings and grants opportunities to fund solar energy infrastructure purchase and installation
- Access to solar energy infrastructure through grants – integration into communication with guests as well as reap reductions in electricity costs
- Development of lodge edible garden – long-term, easy maintenance, development costs and logistics, links to nutrition, health and wellbeing for guests. Potential cost reduction in produce purchases and even an emergent income stream if linked to community farmer’s market or monthly markets
- Refinement and improvement of water and wastewater treatment system so water can be used for irrigation of gardens and toilet flushing
- Continue to build the lodge’s indigenous cultural heritage activities and connect with Elders and Traditional Owners so practical, meaningful, place-based learning can be strengthened
- Professional development for all staff in relevant areas
- Accreditation under Ecotourism Australia’s sustainability program

Notes:

