



Of the Greater Philadelphia Area

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*Your partner for solving
environmental compliance requirements
and beyond!*

Sustainability Reporting

You have worked so hard to implement sustainability initiatives. You are seeing real progress and feel like you are making a difference. Well, shout about it!

Preparing a Sustainability Report provides stakeholders hard data that your investment is worthwhile. It provides transparency to the investment community, especially when reported in accordance with international reporting standards. It is a vehicle that can be used to set your company apart from competitors.

Recent research conducted by The Centre for Sustainability and Excellence on approximately 650 Sustainability Reports in North America shows a correlation between sustainability programming and reporting and financial success. See the link in the "Resources" section of this paper for more information.



7 Habits of Highly Effective Sustainability Programs

There are so many stories about companies implementing successful sustainability programs. Yet, there are some stories about companies who claim to be doing good, but there is no real data or transparency to back up their claims. What's the difference, and how do you plan for a successful sustainability program?

I have come to realize that there are seven habits of highly effective sustainability programs:

- Set SMART goals
- Start early and often
- Tie initiatives to business objectives
- Engage stakeholders
- Address real material issues
- Ensure multi-level organizational involvement
- Involve your supply chain

This article will provide detail related to these "habits."

Set SMART goals. We all know that what gets measured gets done. With that in mind, set sustainability goals that are specific, measurable, assignable, relevant and time-based. Setting goals that meet these criteria will be the foundation for the success of your initiatives.

Start Early and Often. Before you design a new product, before you initiate a building renovation, or before you implement a new business strategy, think about how these projects can help to meet your sustainability goals. Ensure that every proposal request, contract signed, and item purchased can be measured by the goals that you set. For example, how do you know if the equipment being installed meets your energy goals, or if the product being purchased contains ingredients that your company has "black listed" if you haven't embedded these goals within the purchasing process?

*"Your goals have to be
S.M.A.R.T.!"*

About the Author

Donna Switzer is the founder of Beyond Compliance LLC Consulting of the Greater Philadelphia Area, a woman-owned sustainability and environmental, health and safety (EHS) consulting firm that partners with industry to solve regulatory compliance requirements. Donna is passionate about reducing risks associated with air emissions, wastewater discharges, waste management, and workplace safety. She has worked with a broad range of companies in chemical, pharmaceutical, manufacturing, construction, and power sectors in developing, implementing, and evaluating key sustainability and EHS programs.

Donna is an Adjunct Professor at Villanova University and holds the following certifications: Certified Sustainability Practitioner, Certified Professional Environmental Auditor, and Certified Hazardous Materials Manager.

It is easier to write an energy requirement into a proposal request, than to require a contractor to purchase different equipment that may increase the budget or result in delays to the project.

Tie your sustainability initiatives to your business objectives. They don't call Sustainability the "triple bottom line" for nothing! Company sustainability initiatives must have a positive impact on company financials. Aligning sustainability programs around your business objectives ensures that resources will be available and all levels of the organization will be speaking the same language. Some companies even place an internal "cost" for making decisions counter to the sustainability initiatives. For example, assigning premium costs back to a business unit for waste generation or water usage.

Stakeholder engagement. This is a critical aspect to your sustainability program. Knowing what is important to employees, shareholders, neighbors and customers will help inform the company's decisions about what goals to establish and what initiatives to pursue. Holding meetings, sending questionnaires, and having a link on your website for program feedback are all ways to solicit information from your stakeholders.

Greenwashing is bad! "Greenwashing" is when marketing is deceptively used to promote the perception that an organization's products, aims or policies are environmentally friendly. An example of this is a national beer brewer that is boasting about installing solar panels, when they are ignoring that they use ~20-gallons of water to make each pint of beer. Ensure that sustainability initiatives are important to stakeholders and material to the business. Then, report all the results in a report that meets standardized reporting formats. See the reporting side bar.

Involve everyone in your organization. Engage all levels of company employees. A sustainability program should be a group effort and not just "pushed through" by a single professional. The program needs support and resources from C-Suite executives, mid-level managers, plant managers and line-level employees alike.

Supply-Chain. Now that you have set goals for your company, requiring your suppliers and vendors to report on their sustainability objectives will catapult your program. This may be the most difficult part of a sustainability program because of the level of control that you may or may not have, but it can have the biggest impact. Requiring suppliers to set sustainability goals causes a ripple effect throughout your industry.

In conclusion...

Careful planning and identifying material initiatives are absolutely required when implementing a successful sustainability program. A company must gather information from and get support from all levels of the organization. Then, be transparent and issue a sustainability report.

If you would like more information about how you can plan for and implement a successful sustainability program, or if you would like to compare your program to others in your sector, please contact us.

Resources:

Photo by Jessica Devnani from Burst

CSE Research:
<https://cse-net.org/consulting-services/learn-five-emerging-trends-in-north-america/>

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