

How to conduct a Sustainability Audit Handbook

The Brief:

Conduct a Club Sustainability Audit and identify two areas of improvement. Research the most viable option to implement in your club and report your findings on why you made this decision. Create an impact report on the results after trialling and implementing the sustainability change within 3 months to the SU.

How to conduct a Sustainability Audit

What is a Sustainability Audit?

Instead of throwing darts or casting blindly, it's most efficient to develop a sustainability strategy based on data, interest level and, yes, some Googling. Putting time, money and energy into a less efficient or useful strategy ultimately harms your team's goals of being more sustainable.

A sure-fire way to generate an effective sustainability strategy is with a sustainability audit. A sustainability audit is a look inside your team to determine the most powerful way to practice sustainability.

An audit is a commitment; it's harder than just picking something and deciding to reduce it. Audits can take weeks, or even months, to complete and need a strong leadership team to propel them forward. However, if you're serious about a sustainability strategy within your team, audits deliver results.

An audit is the best way to make sure that you're attacking the sustainability actions that you should be addressing. The method is proven to find what's most important to your team and weaves it into the fabric of your daily processes.

As a starting point, consider the life cycle of the products you buy & use in your team. From equipment to plastic water bottles, how are you minimizing the footprint of your product—do you have a take-back program, a recycling partner, or something else?

Methodology

First up is Data Collection. Determine where the team currently stands with sustainability. Meetings, surveys and 'needs determination' will be useful here. Meet with each member or have a series of focus groups and figure out what actions you as a team are doing which impact sustainability negatively. For example, is the team creating unnecessary waste? This can be in more than one area. The more areas you identify to explore as potential sustainability issues, the easier it will be to narrow down to two, then deciding between the two which one, as a team, you want to tackle.

Essentially you need to create a document which shows all the areas you have identified as 'wasteful' or could be improved with more sustainable solutions/options.

Reduction

Reduction methods are practices to decrease resources and costs. Once you've determined resources to reduce from collecting data, now it's time to reduce using methods. We recommend at this point to start creating goals which include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). Indicators compare metrics to your team activities. KPI's assist in reporting and translating sustainability efforts while tracking progress over time.

Sustainability goals are the motivating factors and the hopeful end result of your audit. When you see companies talk about "Carbon Neutral by 2025!" or "100% Renewable Energy by 2040!" those are sustainability goals.

Having a goal keeps everyone on track and committed. Think of teams or projects you've been on with or without goals. Which was more effective?

Baselines and Focus Areas

In this section, you'll learn how to figure out what you should be reducing, your **focus area**. And learn about setting your goal against a baseline. To improve, you must have a starting point. The baseline is your starting point.

If you've set up your plan correctly, you're likely focusing on a specific environmental area, like energy reduction or carbon offsets.

Pick energy, waste, water, team players involved, any area you want to focus on for sustainability.

Good Examples: Reducing Energy, Reducing Water, Number of Team Players Involved in Sustainability, Number of Sustainable Products purchased, Pounds of produce purchased from a Local Farm, Waste Diversion.

Bad Examples: "The Environment." It's pretty hard to pick a "wrong" area because the nature of choosing an area helps you focus on what you're doing. Make the area as clear as possible. Even "energy" can be broad sometimes. Electricity? HVAC?

The baseline is about the numbers. What number are you trying to beat? It's your starting point to work towards your goal.

To pick a baseline, it can be helpful to look at previous months or years. If you don't have any previous data to base on, look at your reduction habits.

The number doesn't necessarily need to be beaten either, it could be that your baseline is the first one set for your team. For example, you could decide that 50% of the water bottles purchased over a season are to be recycled.

Reduction Number

That "by 10%" you see tacked onto a goal like "Reduce Waste by 10%" doesn't come from air. Figure out the best way to pick a reduction number that is achievable. Seeing goals being met keeps up motivation long term and increases awareness.

Target Completion Date

When do you want this goal to be done by? What's ambitious and what's too close to be valuable?

Accountability, Systems and Goal Tracking

The goal is set! Let's make sure you hit it.

We recommend at this stage that you start using an Excel spreadsheet to track your progress against your goals.

Create Systems

Once you announce the sustainability goal, start putting a system in place for accountability. This system should include feedback (see below), tracking and a list of people accountable.

If you have multiple goals, do this for each one.

Communicate Progress

You need to be able to communicate when goals are happening, what the end dates are and how to improve it. Communicating back and forth with the team completing the initiatives keeps them on track. Communicate expectations, what will happen when the goal is met and what will happen if it is not met.

Set Regular Meetings or Check-ins

No matter what goals you set, having regularly scheduled meetings to review progress will help keep you on track, identify any changes that need to be made, and follow up on progress previously made.

Be sure to publicize and communicate the minutes or takeaways from these meetings to everyone involved in the goals. Not everyone needs to attend the meetings, but everyone should be aware of the outcome, any changes needed, or progress updates.

Treat Sustainability as You Would Other Goals

How do you treat other goals in your team? Throw a party when you accomplish them? Follow those same practices here. The aim is to mould the goal to fit your existing team culture. What is accountability like for these goals? Use the knowledge you already have about the goal to make sure they work for you.

Sharing Your Goals

You've worked so hard to get these sustainability goals in motion. You've done the baseline, the target dates, the numbers, and the accountability. Now for how to share them with your teammates, other teams, sponsors and the University/SU as a whole.

Best practices for sustainability goals include sticking to your culture, figuring out who to share with, picking a medium to share on, how often to share, and at what stages to share. It's a lot! Select which of these you need help with or are interested in to determine your goals.

Involve the SU Marketing and Communications team in decision making and work with them to make a framework for sharing. Usually, they will have the best idea on why you should promote, where to promote and how.

Team Ownership

Team Ownership uses members engagement and accountability to reduce resources and hit goals. Members take ownership of reduction methods and incorporate them directly into processes. Reduction methods are assigned to members and committee members.

For the sports team as an example to share out ownership, the Social Exec member is responsible for sharing sustainability updates on the platforms and within the team. The captain and or vice-captain focuses on the travel policy and the treasurer is responsible for the 'supply chain', that is making sure all purchases are sustainable. Where this is difficult or impossible, how can you make it more sustainable? Can you source the same object in the UK, for example, and reduce the carbon footprint?

Report your Audit findings

So now you have identified at least two areas within your Club which you could improve on regarding sustainability, and have written up the findings using the methodology above in a report as an audit. The hard work is pretty much done; now you need to choose as a team which one you will focus on for the remainder of the year/s and implement the goals you set out in the audit report, and how you will

move forward with it. Within this section we expect to have information on why you chose this particular audit goal over the others; could it be that it benefits the environment more than the others? Is it easier to implement as a starting point; were the others too expensive or impossible at this stage to use as a goal?

Impact Report

Good impact reporting is an essential part of impact measurement. It allows you as a team to reflect, to communicate your values and share good practice with others, while discussing the results of your sustainability work to promote a culture of learning and transparency.

Fundamentally, impact reporting is a communication strategy used to convey the change created by a team via an activity or behavioural change and how it was made. An impact report is not just a description of the team's activities affecting the change; it also should include analysis about how much difference happened.

The impact report doesn't have to be a long drawn out piece of work, but it should be clear and concise as a conclusion to your audit report, with an update on where your team is now compared to the goal you set initially and how much progress has been made.

To break it down as an example, perhaps your team decides that for every practice game you want to reduce the need of members travelling to the training ground individually in a car. As part of your audit, you discover that 5 of your team would normally have taken their own car, and this would have created a total amount of miles. Now every single member of your team car-shares, which has cut down on the total milage. This has had an impact either by saving fuel, reducing carbon footprint or emissions (or all three).

This is your opportunity as a team to reflect on how one small change has benefitted the environment and created behavioural changes within the team.