

BIG GOALS, SMALL CHANGES: Bringing the SDGs Home



A Simple Guide for Organizations

Contributors:

Claire Pei

Pia Tiwari

Lauren Nash

Aisha Alli

Michael Schmitz

Mohammed Ahsan

Supervisor:

Dr. Dorothea Christiana

United Nations Association Scotland

Charity No. SC048547

With support from:

Chris Leakey, People Ocean Planet

Benjamin Carey, Carey Tourism

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Introduction

What is sustainability?

Whilst tackling global problems such as the climate crisis and poverty seem out of reach for an individual to make a difference, there are many ways in which collective small actions can make a difference. In addition to making changes in [one's own lifestyle](#), sharing the wealth of knowledge and bringing the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to the core of your workplace is a crucial step for local action toward global goals.

As many people spend a significant portion of their time at work, you can imagine how much consumption and waste takes place outside of the home.

- For example, annually, the [UK commercial and industrial sector](#) generates about 40 million tonnes of waste, which is nearly 150% that of UK households combined.

Thus, it is equally as important, if not more, to bring the SDGs to the workplace and encourage your company or organisation to think critically about their impact. The most powerful action we can take as individuals is to spread the word to catalyse further improvements in our communities, including at our employment. If you have a position of authority or influence in your organisation, you have a particular opportunity to help lead the way and facilitate greater change.

Taking Stock - Know How Well You Are Doing Already

There are some free tools available to help your organisation self-assess its climate footprint and start finding ways to do better. These are particularly good for small and medium-sized businesses. For example, [CarbonFootprint.com](#) and the [Carbon Trust](#) both offer carbon calculators suitable for smaller organisations.

Both of these (and others!) also provide a service and/or [software](#) to larger organisations whose needs are more complex.

You can also encourage employees to check their own [carbon footprints](#) and collect feedback on aspects that relate to work or occur at the office.

It can also be useful to review your organisation's procurement policies and practices. Could you increase the sustainability standards of equipment, materials and services you buy-in?

Getting Help

You don't have to go it alone. Some of the tips provided here and other resources we point to will help, but there are also lots of organisations and projects out there that have the skills and tools to help you. For example:

- [WRAP - Circular Economy & Resource Efficiency Experts](#) - provide support and services to businesses across a wide range of sectors
- [Zero Waste Scotland](#) provide free business support and sustainability advice, plus funding opportunities to help you do good things, e.g. [Circular Economy Investment Fund](#)
- [Jump](#) is just one specialist service for organisations
- [FEE EcoCampus](#) provides an award programme and a framework to help higher education institutions appraise and improve on-campus sustainability while empowering staff and students to drive much of the movement.
- [Co2logic](#) can help organisations calculate, reduce, offset and communicate on climate change mitigation, ultimately awarding third-party branding upon achieving carbon-neutrality.

OK, let's start making changes!

Food and Catering

In the UK, [6.7 million tonnes](#) of food is wasted every year, amounting to a cost of £10.2 billion per year. Moreover, approximately 8 per cent of human-made greenhouse gas emissions can be attributed to food waste. Making good food and catering decisions is hence not only more environmentally sustainable but also more economically viable for your organization.

If your organisation outsources its catering needs, ask the contractor about their sustainability practices, covering both the sourcing of food and drink, the use of packaging and disposables and how they minimise food waste. Next time the contract is up for review, consider raising your standards, even if that means finding a new supplier.

Here are some tips and ideas:

- Incorporate [Meatless Monday](#) into your organization's cafeteria meal plan
- Investigate the practices of the vendors you or your caterer buy from, and give preference to certified sustainable seafood organic produce, for example, where possible.

- Audit your food stock to prevent buying more food than you need and lessening food waste.
- Set goals to minimize your food waste e.g. how much excess food was cooked in the cafeteria? How many [food miles](#) did it take to prepare each dish?
 - Check out the [Office Food Waste Challenge](#) to get further guidance and track your progress
- Promote [nutritious and healthy](#) food choices, such as fruit and vegetables while minimising fats, sugars and salt, to improve the health of employees.
 - Consider working with the [Food for Life Catering Mark](#) with standards such as at least 75% of meals having freshly cooked meals, using only free-range eggs, etc.
- Be careful with the sourcing and carbon footprint of your meat and [greens](#), including thinking about what is available seasonally.
- Consider donating leftover foods to charity or food banks.
- Ensure kitchen appliances are [energy efficient](#).

Did you know? A single avocado takes 140-272 litres of water to produce, in addition to carrying excessive food miles as they aren't native to the UK. *Do your research and don't assume all greens are sustainable.*

Avoid:

- Excessive meat consumption, especially [beef](#), to improve your and the planet's health
- Food that needs to be air-freighted from distant countries
- [Single-use plastics](#) such as plastic cups alongside water coolers
- Disposable packaging and containers. Where absolutely necessary, encourage employees to reuse them e.g. to carry food on a hike

Tip: Use a [water footprint calculator](#) to learn more about the water used to bring together your lunch

Choose to:

- Offer more vegetarian or vegan options in your cafeteria
- Support [local vendors](#) and buy seasonal produce where possible
- Buy [ethically sourced](#) produce when possible
- Provide coffee pods that are recyclable (made of aluminium), compostable, or reusable. Opt for [pickup services](#) to recycle used coffee pods.

Waste Mitigation and Disposal

It is estimated that the UK produced [41.1 million tonnes of commercial and industrial waste](#) in 2016. In order to reduce waste, a good starting point for businesses is to conduct a [waste audit](#) to understand the type and amount of corporate waste.

Reduce Waste:

- Only print if it is essential!
 - If needed, print smarter – use recycled paper, change the page margins, avoid printing in colour, use the ‘draft’ or ‘fast’ setting, and print double-sided.
 - Reduce the number of print facilities, and do some research on the environmental credentials of different models.
- Buy refillable ink or toner cartridges, rather than throwing away empty cartridges.
- Avoid [laminating](#) paper as this prevents both materials from being recycled.
- Reuse incoming packaging for internal use, such as envelopes and boxes.
- Order supplies in bulk, rather than individually packaged items, to reduce packaging.
 - Ask suppliers to take back bulk packaging for reuse.
- Encourage employees to exchange items, such as holding a [swapping event](#).
- Conduct a [Life Cycle Analysis](#) for any product, service, or materials you sell.

Replace:

- Replace post-it notes or notebooks with scrap paper.
- Replace paper towels with sensor-enabled hand dryers in bathrooms.
 - Or tea towels in the kitchens.
- Replace business cards with apps such as [CAMCard](#).
- Replace regular menstrual products with organic, biodegradable varieties, and place them in bathrooms for all genders.
- Query your organisation’s approach to electronic equipment, such as laptops and mobile phones. Can you sometimes buy refurbished rather than new equipment? Is old equipment sent for refurbishment or recycling?

Provision for Waste Disposal:

- Place recycling bins in convenient locations, such as next to printers and in cafeterias.
- Implement a [centralised recycling and waste system](#), such as for general waste, paper, plastics, glass, cans and compost, to replace individual bins.
- Ensure the bins are clearly labelled with detailed instructions.
- Consider [transparent bins](#) to prevent cross-contamination and to visibly represent the office’s waste habits, perhaps instilling a motivation to improve

- Provide non-standard recycling bins for e-waste, wires and cables, batteries, light bulbs and printer cartridges.
- Consider [Enviro-Waste](#) and other similar organisations that can collect, organise and recycle waste on your behalf, as well as providing waste management consultancy.

Paperless Offices:

- Use applications such as [Google Docs](#) and [Dropbox](#) to create, edit and share files.
- Switch to digital note-taking, using [Microsoft OneNote](#) or [Evernote](#).
- Store files digitally, rather than in a filing cabinet.
- Send internal communications by email or on an online message board, rather than printed communications.
- Use digital agreements and e-signatures instead of printed legal documents.
- Request suppliers to send online invoices and to contact the business electronically.
- However, avoid excessive accumulation of duplicate, old or unnecessary digital files - it all takes up space and energy on servers and the 'cloud'.

When taking steps to transition towards a paperless office, be mindful of the well-being impacts of constant technology use and how technology is also associated with carbon emissions, such that large files attached to long emails can also [increase your carbon footprint](#).

Sustainable Investment and Green Growth

With rising consciousness of the devastating effects of climate change on our social and ecological environment, the practice of sustainable finance has garnered attention from investors and private agents alike.

According to the Financial Times, less than \$2 trillion were invested sustainably in 2013. By 2019 this number had rocketed to a total amount of [more than \\$31 trillion](#). Now around 25% of all funds consider sustainability. Evidently, sustainable investments [do not have to come at the price of economic profitability](#).

In terms of capital investment, dare to invest in sustainable infrastructure and green technologies:

- Green technologies and renewable energy are here to stay. Both the [UK](#) and [EU](#) operate under strong commitment to achieving carbon-neutrality by 2050. Emission-trading platforms will render climate-harmful investments more and more expensive with rising permit prices.

- [Your investments matter in the long term!](#) Initial costs can be expected to produce efficient outcomes in the medium to long term.

Consider that long-term risks associated with green investment are often overstated [in comparison to business-as-usual investment practices](#). Green investments further reduce catastrophic risks by lowering and offsetting carbon emissions.

In terms of risk calculations, know that there are existing government support schemes to lower your initial investment in new capital.

- The UK announced [£134 million of greentech financing aid](#) allocated to businesses
- Furthermore, a [report by MSCI](#) found that companies which incorporated sustainable investment practices were significantly more profitable and were able to pay higher dividends.

Recognise where nature and healthy ecosystems are important for the sustained productivity of your business, as it is for many parts of the food and drink sectors, tourism industry and water industry, not to mention the well-being of your workforce!

Natural Capital approaches to business management and investments are becoming commonplace and with benefits far beyond an improved corporate image. Guidance and toolkits are available and improving all the time, such as the [Capitals Checker from the Natural Capital Coalition](#). You can also get involved with business partnerships for nature, such as [Scotland's Forum on Natural Capital](#) and [Business for Nature](#).

Transport and Active Travel

Means of passenger travel and transportation of goods play a crucial role in the fight against climate change. With an ever more environmentally aware workforce, reducing your corporate carbon footprint will not only help save the planet but also increase employee satisfaction, [a recent study found](#).

Did you know, 16.2% of global greenhouse gas emissions are traced back to shipping and transport alone?

Encourage:

- Your co-workers to utilise a carbon-calculator app such as the one provided by [WWF](#), to make more climate-friendly travel and commuting choices in day-to-day work life.

- Adapt your organisation's internal travel policy to nudge employees to travel by public transport when travelling for work. This will help cut costs and will minimise your organisation's carbon footprint.
 - Implementing a [digital expense management solution](#) can help to visualise costs and thus allows employees to reflect on their travel choices before commencing the claiming process.
- When air travel is necessary, book economy tickets rather than business class, which use less space and therefore a smaller share of the carbon footprint. Consider offsetting the carbon cost of flights and other travel, but not as an excuse for doing it! There are lots of offsetting schemes available, but do some research to choose the most credible.
- If air travel is necessary, consider more eco-friendly airlines. [Alternative Airlines](#) suggests the best airlines and airports which incorporate sustainable practices.
- If travel is necessary, limit the number of travellers, attend more than one meeting per trip and pack light.
- Try [TripZero](#) for your hotel search and booking service.
- Consider setting a carbon as well as a financial budget for business travel across your organisation or per employee, gradually challenging yourselves to reduce your budget.

Tip: Check out Euromonitor International's [Sustainable Travel Index](#) for advice regarding the environmental and social impacts of travelling to a given country.

For further details about the Sustainable Travel Index, please contact Caroline Bremner, Head of Travel Research at Euromonitor International on caroline.bremner@euromonitor.com

Ask yourself...

Is travelling to meet in person truly necessary to achieve your business goals? With COVID-19 making us re-consider modern means of communication, a variety of new online collaborative tools and software have become available. Thanks to this change, online meetings and conferences are more efficient than ever before.

Consider instead:

- Use tools like [Miro](#) to facilitate visual planning, mind-mapping and brainstorming during online meetings with multiple people.
- Explore the full range of features at your disposal with your online meeting software of choice. For example, did you know that Zoom [lets you annotate a shared screen](#)?
- Allow employees to flexibly work from home if in-person presence is not crucial.
- Provide support programmes to help employees establish a home-office setting that will allow them to follow and participate in conferences from home. Suggest some home-office inspiration from the [DressMyDesk blog](#)!
- Working from home can also [drastically increase employees' productivity](#)

- Working from home can also create a more [inclusive workplace](#) by allowing new parents (especially mothers), low-income earners who cannot afford childcare, and disabled individuals to participate

Switch...

- To low carbon commuting options between the office and home, such as walking!
- Suggest participation in [Bike Week UK](#) to challenge your co-workers and employees to raise awareness of pollution of car travel.
- If possible, provide bathroom and shower facilities to support your employees in making the choice to bike to the office.
- Consider providing bike parking areas and electric car chargers at the office's parking lot.
- Promote [car sharing](#).
- Consider delivery services that use carbon-neutral transport methods, such as [Ecofleet](#).

Energy and Insulation

If you're trying to turn your office energy-efficient and sustainable, there's a lot of work to do, but it's important to start somewhere!

Not One Ounce of Carbon Wasted...

- Let's start out with an easy one: office plants help [combat indoor pollutants](#), produce fresh air, manifest the aesthetic of a sustainable workplace, and [boost people's health](#)

Lights

- Replace standard light bulbs with LEDs to lower energy bills and carbon usage
- Install motion-sensor [lighting](#) so that it switches off when not in use
- More windows/glass partitions to allow natural light + reduce the need for artificial lighting (also [good for employee morale](#))

Water

- Look at installing waterless urinals, sensor taps and if applicable low flow showers to prevent water waste
 - Fix any leaks or dripping taps to reduce water waste.
- Install a water meter to monitor and reduce consumption.
- In the UK we are lucky to have safe drinking water straight out of the tap - no need to buy water dispensers at the office!

- Consider reusing [rainwater](#) or installing a greywater recycling system to reduce the amount of freshwater used
 - This can be used for toilet flushing or watering plants.

Outlets

- Making sure power sockets can be/are switched off when not in use
 - Install smart power strips or similar products so that the power turns off when not in use

Heat

Did you know that roughly [10%](#) of the world's energy is consumed to provide heating to indoor spaces? Here's what your workplace could be doing to help out...

- Making sure the office is well insulated (roofs, floors, walls).
- Ensure all windows and doors are closed when the heating is on.
- Rethink and reconfigure the office layout to reduce energy waste on heating and lighting spaces that are under-utilised or unused.
- Opt for [Draught-proof](#) windows, floors, doors and chimneys to reduce energy waste.
- Consult [Energy Saving Trust](#) for general tips on insulation and energy-saving

The Next Step...

Energy Generation

- Find [an energy provider](#) that works off of sustainable resources such as hydroelectric, solar, and wind energy. As an organisation or business, this might be something you can pursue in partnership with the local community - see [Community Energy Scotland](#) for ideas.
- Consider onsite power generation by installing solar panels or a rooftop wind farm, with the potential to sell energy back to the grid
- Consider investing in a Combined Heat and Power ([CHP](#)) unit, which saves building energy that would otherwise be lost

Building Relocation

If you're in the market or willing to change buildings in order to secure an improved carbon footprint...

- Try to locate your business in a residential area, where local employees and customers might be able to commute without much transportation
- Consider spaces with sustainable architecture that use credible certification systems such as [LEED](#) and [BREEAM](#).

- Look for “green” buildings with greater ventilation, more natural light, and non-chemical-emitting materials used in their construction are not only sustainable due to lower energy use, but also boost employee health and productivity

The Future

Lastly, stay engaged with new and greener technology which may be on the horizon...

- AI and advanced computer analysis is predicted to better address energy waste and sustainability in the average office
- Stay open-minded and look, if possible, into incorporating these services into your business!

Technology

Modern devices are often made of minerals rare-earth elements whose extraction can be linked to pollution, habitat loss and forced labour. E-waste is also the fastest growing waste stream and [is connected to the growing demand to extend mining activities into the deep sea](#). Promoting the sustainable usage of technology in the workplace will reflect positively on your brand and works towards combating these issues, inside and even outside the office. Integrating the following practices will help educate your workers and enable them to make environmentally conscious decisions.

Device sustainability

- Recognise that office laptops are [five times more efficient](#) than desktops, and they enable the ability for employees to work from home instead of commuting
- [Energy Star](#)-labeled appliances are a good place to start in providing energy-efficient workplace technology
- Before buying devices for your business try to lease them, there are plenty of providers for this service and doing so mitigates the resource consumption resulting from new products
- If purchasing, [Dell](#), [Apple](#), and [Vodafone](#) (for example) have sales departments dedicated to reselling second-hand products, examine these options before purchasing new devices for your employees
- Most local councils have recycling services for devices so that their materials can be reused or refurbished. Many private services and social enterprises also exist, many also providing a service to help you ensure any personal data has been cleared from devices.
- Consider purchasing items such as chargers that cap charging at 80%, helping ease the strain on device batteries

- Encourage [healthy device practices](#) in your workplace, providing a tutorial on increase device longevity and efficiency

Green software

- Try using [Ecosia](#) as your organisation's default search engine, using advertising revenue it donates 80% of its profits to plant trees in deforested areas and fund biodiversity
 - Here's a [review](#) of their sustainability to find out more!
- Look into your company's data consumption and take steps to reduce it - the world's data servers emit more than all airlines [combined](#)
- Companies, such as Intel, are starting to offer tools to maximise application energy efficiency
 - [On its website](#), Intel provides information on how to maximise battery life and how to avoid making inefficient systems on Intel software

Workplace Culture

- A sustainable workplace culture includes:
 1. Incorporating eco-friendly practices
 2. Promoting gender equality
 3. Ensuring that the business does not compromise the health or quality of life of the community
- Establish an organizational sustainability vision i.e. zero-carbon or no paper.
 - Ensure that all employees are aware of this vision.
 - Implement smaller objectives to achieve this goal.
 - Create individual targets for each employee.
 - Offer awards to employees who meet their sustainability objectives.
- Consider developing training for your staff, such as with [The Carbon Literacy Project](#)
- Reduce the organization's environmental footprint through reporting to the [Carbon Disclosure Project](#) which creates systems for businesses to reduce their environmental impact.
- Through [Climate Perks](#), consider rewarding staff using low-carbon transport for their holidays.
- Implement 360-degree feedback practices focusing on employee's views and suggestions on improving and furthering corporate sustainability.
- Ensure that all workers are paid a fair and liveable wage and have provided their explicit consent to work for your organisation.
- Incorporate charity into workplace culture:
 - Promote fundraising events e.g. corporate fun runs or marathons.

- Offer grants for charity work where members of your organization can support environmental projects.
 - A culture of allyship is integral to promoting and fostering sustainable workplace practices. This is where addressing equality issues around gender, age and seniority, for example, can spill over to environmental sustainability.
 - Considering working towards relevant environmental certifications or joining relevant sustainability organizations for your field e.g. [Green Tourism](#) for travel agencies, or the [Sustainable Restaurant Association](#) for restaurants
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Thank you for taking the next step
toward sustainable living and helping achieve
the Sustainable Development Goals!

