



# BIC Sustainability 101 Guides

*BIC Sustainability 101 Guides are a series of short, introductory level, papers on sustainability topics of interest to BIC Members.*

*If there is a topic you would like to see as a BIC Sustainability 101 Guide, please contact [info@bic.org.uk](mailto:info@bic.org.uk)*

## Guide 2 – How to Start Your Sustainability Journey

In *Guide 1 - The What and Why of Sustainability* we talked about the reasons for wanting a sustainability agenda, program, or management structure. The short answer is that sustainability is now a fundamental ethical, commercial, and legal necessity in view of retaining business relationships, creating a positive work environment for employees, and delivering long-term profitability.

This can be built upon as momentum grows with time.

This second guide is now going to expand upon this and explain how an organisation can start its sustainability journey. It is important to remember that an organisation's sustainability agenda should not operate as an independent work stream, but one that connects and empowers all areas and individuals within the organisation to its core goals.

### Senior management buy-in

When an organisation starts its sustainability journey it is important to have senior management buy-in, without it the journey may not succeed. The senior management team need to understand the benefits to the business and how these can help the organisation grow and thrive in the current market, even if this means changes of processes or costs to the business.

This does not mean that one senior manager has to do all the work, but additional senior management colleagues, and/or board members should help drive the journey, through support, taking the lead and championing the journey to the rest of the organisation in order to help drive effective change throughout the organisation.

### Who is going to take the lead

In theory, the person taking the lead in the organisation, could be anyone provided they have the support of the board/senior management. It would be helpful if there was a board/senior management member who could act as a sponsor for an organisation's journey. This sponsor could also act as a sounding board. The person taking the lead also needs to be able to influence employees, explain why the organisation has started this journey and how the employees can help. This will require good communication skills and the ability to lead. Enthusiasm for environmental and social sustainability and all that encompasses it is a must.

### Creating a sustainability team

The size of the organisation will normally define the size of the team required. Asking employees in the organisation will generate a ready and willing team to work on the plan. These are likely to be employees who are already doing all they can in their daily lives with regards to sustainability and climate action, from recycling to using public transport etc. In this way members of the team could lead on areas that they are passionate about or have more knowledge. Larger organisations, that can afford to, may well have dedicated employees who solely work on sustainability as a Full Time Employee (FTE).

When it comes to change people generally fall into three groups:

1. Those who are open to change,
2. Those who need a little convincing but get there quite quickly as they can see the benefits of the change, and finally
3. Those who do not see a reason to change and will take a lot of persuading.



Once an organisation has the first two groups onboard it generally becomes easier to convince the third.

## Defining the goals and target setting from the outset

This part of the process is the most challenging. All the regulations and requirements can seem overwhelming and daunting for an organisation. What follows are some hints and tips put together by [BIC's Green Supply Chain Committee](#) Members:

### Impact

Start by thinking about what the organisation does as a business. What impact does the organisation and its products have on sustainability? This will look different for every type of organisation however there will be commonalities with peers, across the same types of organisations and across the supply chain.

### Research

Research other organisations in the same field to understand what they are doing, i.e., have they used a consultant to help them. Is this plausible for the organisation or too expensive. Is the organisation going to align its plan with the [UN Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDGs)? What areas of sustainability are held as important by your stakeholders?

### Road-Map

Once an organisation has decided what its goals and targets are then they should ideally create a road-map detailing how and when they are going to deliver these goals and targets. The road-map should also consider the various reporting requirements the organisation has based upon its size. For larger organisations there are mandatory regulations and reports that must be adhered to. For SMEs reporting might be more about a sustainability section in their annual report, for example.

The road-map will need to be communicated to both the employees and shareholders (if there are any), so all concerned can see what the organisation is planning and how they intend to carry out their journey. Then whatever reports are being written can clearly show how the organisation is tracking against its sustainability goals and targets.

### Quick wins

Then look at what changes could be made as 'quick wins', such as making it easier for employees to recycle waste at work, replacing light bulbs for LED versions, and looking at upgrading to a motion sensitive lighting system etc. As an example, one printer traffic-lighted all their electrical equipment. So, green meant 'turn-off' when you go home, amber 'ask before turning-off' and red 'do not turn-off under any circumstances'. This resulted in them saving £30,000 to £40,000 per quarter on their electricity bill. So, small changes can make a huge difference.

### Metrics

As part of this process, look to establish monitoring metrics and indicators to guide and track your progress with regards to the goals your organisation has defined and consider ways of communicating your commitments and progress to internal and external stakeholders.

## The importance of collaboration

Collaboration is the most important part of the journey, having a team working on the sustainability agenda, program, or management structure means they can support each other, share ideas and the workload. This way the team can work together to build a comprehensive plan to take to the board/senior management team for approval.

As well as within the organisation, it is helpful to explore opportunities to collaborate with peers and across the supply chain. Acting on sustainability is likely to lead to changes to the way the organisation operates which will need to be coordinated across the supply chain. This could potentially have the added benefit of being able to align/standardise objectives across the organisations supply chain.

## How to communicate the plan to staff, stake holders and suppliers

Firstly, board approval (for organisations that have a board) or senior team/owner approval will be required especially if there is a financial outlay for the organisation. Secondly, the team can start to

prepare the best way to effectively communicate the plan within the organisation once signed off. This will help with the creation of a delivery strategy that emphasises the positives both to the organisation and the employees themselves. If people can understand how something relates to themselves, it is easier for them to embrace the change and what is going to be required as part of the organisation's sustainability journey. Regular organisation-wide updates with positive messaging, plus information about plans for next steps, and progress reports can help maintain motivation and engagement.

## How to keep it going

Once the goals, and roadmap have been set, a delivery plan defined, and communication channels decided upon, it is important to maintain momentum. Here are some suggestions as to next steps:

- Determine suitable monitoring metrics relevant to your defined environmental goals and regulatory reporting – this could be simple as waste/recycling volumes, energy usage and their wider Impact on areas such as biodiversity and resource depletion. This is a way of demonstrating progress,
- Create regular and consistent communication channels to maintain and build momentum. Create branding around the message so it is clear for all readers,
- Be transparent around mistakes, challenges and lessons learnt along the way. This will help employees understand how the journey is going,
- Maintain an active presence within the industry, sharing ideas and contributing to the discussion – a great way to collaborate with others and provide feedback to your journey,
- Empower others within the organisation to initiate and implement their own ideas for sustainability,
- Find opportunities to learn more about sustainability e.g., new events, workshops, webinars and sign-up to sustainability email newsletters and blogs,
- Create a centralised platform/space for people to access resources,
- Communicate what the rest of the supply chain, including what the suppliers and customers are doing. This can help explain the decisions the organisation is making to adjust its plan to be a better one,
- Consider how sustainability relates to employees' day-to-day lives e.g. provision tips on saving energy in the home/linking to further resources.

## Directory of information

[BIC Green Hub](#)

[UN Sustainable Development Goals](#)

## Glossary

Acronym	Full name	Description	Further notes
	1.5°C	Science has made it clear that we must limit global temperature rise to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. We are currently at 1.1°C and are on track for 2.7°C according to the UNDP's Emissions Gap Report 2021 by 2030. Every fraction of a degree matters. Wildfires, heavy flooding, intense heat, drought, and storms are becoming more frequent and devastating. Every bit of warming we avoid will reduce the climate risks we face. We need to keep global warming to 1.5°C to have a fighting chance of having a habitable and a thriving planet for all of us.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>

Acronym	Full name	Description	Further notes
	Carbon neutral	Although often used interchangeably with 'net-zero', the two are not the same. In general, when companies claim carbon neutrality, they are counterbalancing CO2 emissions with carbon offsets without necessarily having reduced emissions by an amount consistent with reaching net-zero at the global or sector level. This may conceal the need for deeper emissions reductions that are in line with what the science requires for the world to keep global warming to 1.5°C. Carbon neutrality claims also do not necessarily cover non-CO2 GHGs.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>
	CarbonNeutral®	CarbonNeutral® mark indicates you have followed The CarbonNeutral Protocol, which is the global standard, managed for over 20 years, to deliver clear, credible, and transparent carbon neutral programs.	<a href="https://www.climateimpact.com/business-solutions/carbon-offsetting/">https://www.climateimpact.com/business-solutions/carbon-offsetting/</a>
	Climate change adaptation	Policies and measures which make societies and companies more resilient to the impacts of climate change such as flooding and heatwaves.	<a href="#">List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP</a>
	Climate change mitigation	Policies and measures which aim to reduce greenhouse gases from companies and governments with the intention of lessening the global impacts of climate change, such as reducing the amount and intensity of fossil fuel burning. This could also be done with offsetting although not a common use of the term in this case.	<a href="#">List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP</a>
	Carbon footprint	A carbon footprint is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) that are generated by our actions.	<a href="#">The Nature Conservancy</a>
GHGs	Greenhouse gases	Gases that absorb and trap heat (i.e. infrared radiation) from the Sun in the Earth's atmosphere. Includes the following gases that are covered by the UNFCCC/Kyoto Protocol: carbon dioxide (CO2), methane (CH4), nitrous oxide (N2O), hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs), perfluorocarbons (PFCs), sulphur hexafluoride (SF6) and nitrogen trifluoride (NF3). These gases are the direct cause of climate change. The term "GHGs" is often used interchangeably with "all UNFCCC/Kyoto GHGs," and these gases must be covered by targets set under the Net-Zero Standard. Water vapor is also a GHG but is not covered by the UNFCCC/Kyoto Protocol or GHG emissions targets because concentrations of this gas are self-limited by the atmosphere and thus not a direct cause of global warming. It should be noted that some GHG are naturally occurring such as CO2. Carbon dioxide is also released naturally/without human intervention however it not accurate to say it is causing the current levels of climate change.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>

Acronym	Full name	Description	Further notes
	Greenwashing	The practice of falsely promoting an organisation's environmental efforts, or spending more resources to promote the organisation as green than are spent to engage in environmentally sound practices	<a href="#">List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP</a>
	Net-zero	A state of balance between anthropogenic emissions and anthropogenic removals. In most cases, it is important to specify either net-zero CO2 emissions or net-zero GHG emissions, which also includes non-CO2 GHGs. Net-zero GHG emissions must be achieved at the global level to stabilise temperature increase, and targets set using the Net-Zero Standard must cover all UNFCCC/Kyoto GHG emissions. The SBTi's Net-Zero Standard outlines what companies need to do to enable the global economy to achieve net-zero. The Standard makes clear that for corporate net-zero targets in line with keeping global warming to 1.5°C require rapid and deep emission reductions. Companies must take action to halve their emissions by around 2030. Likewise, long-term deep emissions cuts of at least 90% before 2050 are crucial for net-zero targets to align with science.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>
	Paris Agreement	A legally binding international treaty on climate change, adopted at COP21 in Paris in 2015. Its goal is to limit global warming to well below 2, preferably to 1.5 degrees Celsius, compared to pre-industrial levels.	<a href="#">List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP</a>
	Scope 1	Direct GHG emissions occurring from sources that are owned or controlled by the company, for example, emissions from combustion in owned or controlled boilers, furnaces, vehicles, etc. or emissions from chemical production in owned or controlled process equipment.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>
	Scope 2	Emissions from purchased electricity, heat, and steam for use in business operations. Scope 2 emissions physically occur at the facility where electricity is generated, and so would fall into the scope 1 category for the power generator.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>
	Scope 3	Scope 3 is an accounting and reporting category that allows for the treatment of all other indirect emissions. Scope 3 emissions are a consequence of the activities of the company but occur from sources not owned or controlled by the company - typically as a result of supplier or customer activities. These can be up or down the value chain - for example, transport and distribution, or the disposal of goods or services after they reach the consumer. Some examples of scope 3 activities are extraction and production of purchased materials; transportation of purchased fuels; and use of sold products and services.	<a href="#">Net-Zero Jargon Buster - a guide to common terms - Science Based Targets</a>

Acronym	Full name	Description	Further notes
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals	17 social goals established by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. The goals are: No poverty; zero hunger; good health and wellbeing; quality education; gender equality; clean water and sanitation; affordable and clean energy; decent work and economic growth; industry, innovation and infrastructure; reduced inequalities; sustainable cities and communities; responsible consumption and production; climate action; life below water; life on land; peace, justice and strong institutions; and partnerships for the goals	<a href="#">List of Sustainability Definitions - CDP</a>

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