

Sustainability Action Plans

An action plan uses available information to determine what to manage and how to do so. A sustainability action plan incorporates an organization's strategy for achieving its vision, but provides much more detail on how it will be accomplished. The framework of the strategy (long term goals, mid- and near-term targets and performance indicators for each "material" issue) are the backbone of the action plan. Indicators, targets and goals can be quantitative or qualitative in nature, but quantification is often the preferred approach, where feasible.

The scope of the action plan can be narrow or broad, encompassing some or all of an organization, and some or all triple bottom line (economic, environmental, social) issues. Developing a sustainability action plan involves the following key steps:

- Establish the scope of the action plan
- Incorporate key performance indicators, and associated goals and targets (if already developed)

- Provide specific actions to be taken to meet near- and mid-term targets, as soon as such actions can be identified
- Identify the person/team/department/etc. who is/are responsible for carrying out the actions
- Develop a mechanism to report periodic progress and evaluate performance

For years, companies have been employing action planning as a means of managing environmental issues. The rise in sustainability reporting has spurred companies to apply the environmental action planning process to other issues across the triple bottom line. In some cases, action plans come after initial sustainability reporting is underway because reporting focuses attention. For others, planning is done first to provide the structure and foundation for public communication. Either way, action planning and reporting mutually reinforce the value in effectively managing triple bottom line issues over both the long and short term.



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