



Setting Sustainability Goals

A Staples Business Advantage
Expert Solutions Guide

Stepping Stones to a Greener Future:

How to set practical business sustainability goals

In today's business climate, where consumers champion eco-conscious brands and where regulations increasingly favor green initiatives, sustainability has evolved from a buzzword to a business imperative. Gone are the days when sustainability was merely a chapter in the corporate social responsibility handbook. Today, it's a key player in the long-term strategy game. Why? Because sustainability pays — both in terms of the planet and profits.

Yet, despite this crucial understanding, you might still be stuck on one big question:

How can we set specific, attainable sustainability goals that don't just look good on paper but are actually practicable?

Today, we'll help you find the answer.

Why sustainability is no longer optional

Before we dive into the nitty-gritty of carving out sustainability goals, it's essential to understand why. Sustainability is crucial in today's business climate for a plethora of reasons, many of which you've probably heard:

- Enhancing your company/brand reputation
- Reducing operating costs
- Creating a better work environment for employees
- Meeting regulatory requirements
- Simply doing the right thing for the planet

And let's not discount the impact of recent technological innovations in manufacturing, packaging and recycling. These improvements have helped many organizations to discover that their paths toward better sustainability practices are also the stepping stones to **operational excellence and cost efficiency**.

That's right. The **sustainability goals** you set today could make a huge difference in **your company's bottom line** tomorrow.



Meeting sustainability goals

A 60,000-student university **increased green spending by 30% at a lower cost per use** by purchasing green cleaners and office supplies.

Source: Staples Sustainability Capabilities Brochure



Start with your data to make informed decisions.

While leveraging data might not seem like a bold step to protecting the environment, your organization's data on product spend, energy/water consumption and current waste levels can unearth high-impact sustainability opportunities.

To find them, ask yourself specific questions that only your data can answer:

- What percentage of your current purchases are more environmentally friendly products?
- How much electricity does your building consume per month?
- How efficiently is your building using water?
- What items do you currently recycle, and how much?



After you've used your data to assess your current sustainability levels, focus your goal setting on specific areas, such as:

1. Energy efficiency
2. Waste reduction
3. Water conservation
4. Product procurement



**Energy
efficiency**



**Waste
reduction**



**Water
conservation**



**Product
procurement**

You're probably familiar with the first three focus areas. The outlier is the last one: product procurement. While it may seem strange to include, it's actually one of the best ways to enhance your sustainability. That's because

80% or more of your organization's environmental impact comes from the goods and services you purchase — not from your direct operations.¹

For each of these focus areas, we've provided some "goal starter ideas".

Product Procurement Goals Starter Idea:

Pledge to dedicate a certain percentage of your procurement budget towards more environmentally friendly products and services.

An example of this might be to pledge 30% of our annual product spend on more eco-friendly products by 2030.

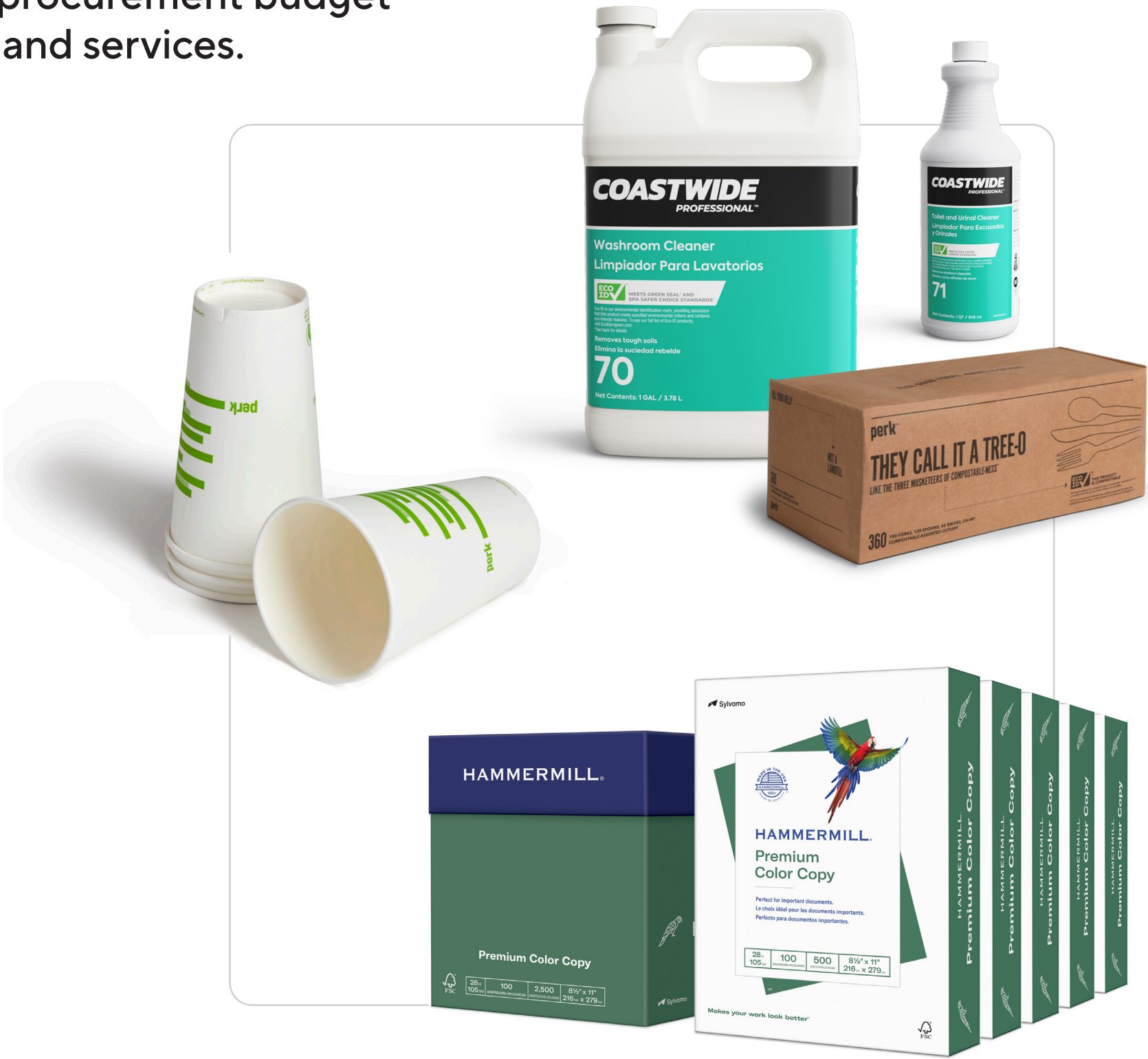
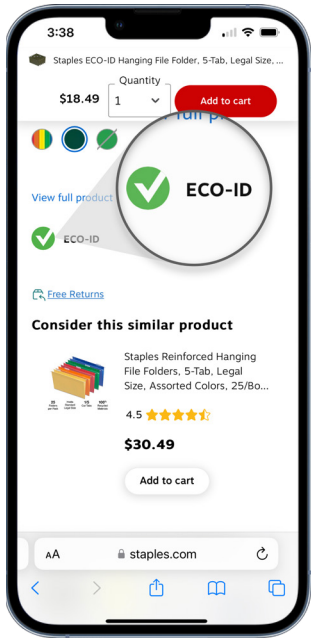
Even a slight shift in your spending towards more sustainable alternatives can significantly impact the environment. And if you're looking for an easy way to find more sustainable products, [Staples Business Advantage® provides more than 9,000 of them online.](#)

✓ ECO-ID

Eco-ID™ is our primary environmental icon that can help you find products that meet strong, credible standards for environmental performance. More than 9,000 items on StaplesAdvantage.com have earned the Eco-ID icon. Just look for the check mark when you shop.



Look for the Eco-ID mark



Energy Goals Starter Idea:

Set a clear percentage goal for energy reduction within a defined timeframe.

For example, you could aim to reduce energy consumption by 10% over five years. Establishing how much energy your organization will not consume is critical to actually conserving energy. The crux lies in being specific and making sure you can measure any sustainability goal you set.

Here's why: you used data to establish your sustainability starting point, and you'll use data to track your progress and make necessary adjustments.

Here are some ways to conserve energy to get you started:

- Use lower wattage lighting and more efficient LED lamps
- Install motion sensors for occupancy and daylight harvesting
- Optimize your energy management systems to control lighting and HVAC

Speaking of energy practices, here's one thought to keep in mind: it's tempting for organizations to skip over the goal setting and jump straight into saving the planet. That's human nature; brainstorming energy practices is the fun part, and implementing your energy-saving projects is always encouraged.

However, establishing your sustainability goals will help your organization align on what you're trying to achieve. Your goals can also hold your leadership accountable for providing the necessary resources to reach them.

Think about it this way:

*The energy goal is **what** you
want to accomplish.*

*The energy practice is **how** you'll do it.*



Waste Management Goals Starter Idea:

Set benchmarks to increase your recycling rates and to reduce the amount of waste you send to landfills.

Here's an example:

"Our company will improve our recycling rate by 20% in the next five years."

Just like we did in procurement and energy, align on the goal (the what), and determine the energy practices you'll use to achieve that goal (the how).

Here are some practices you could employ to achieve your waste management goals:

- Improve your waste segregation processes (by installing [multi-stream recycling stations](#)).
- Reduce restroom waste by installing [automatic towel dispensers](#) and [automatic soap dispensers](#).
- Implement reusable, recyclable or compostable alternatives to single-use disposable products (like reusable cutlery and dishware, [composting in breakrooms](#), and water filtration systems versus bottled water).

Current Staples Recycling Programs you can implement.



Water Conservation Goals Starter Idea:

Set specific targets for reducing water use across your company's operations.

Here's an example:

*"We will reduce our total water consumption
by 20% in the next five years."*

Considering that water is arguably our planet's most precious resource, setting targets for water usage reduction can contribute significantly to the overall health of both your business and the planet.

Along with establishing your water conservation goals, brainstorm the water conserving practices that can help you reach them.

For example:

- Install EPA WaterSense-qualified low-flow plumbing fixtures wherever feasible.
- Leverage sensors on sinks to regulate water use.
- Evaluate your bottled water use, then consider shifting to water filtration and reusable containers for employees.
- Ensure any irrigation is rain-sensor enabled and "smart".
- Take advantage of utility and municipal programs to identify and fix leaks.



Finding Your Sustainability Partner

Staples Business Advantage is eager to serve as your sustainability coach.



Establishing sustainability goals is not an easy thing to do, especially if your organization is in its early stages of becoming eco-friendly. Often, it helps to consult with experts who can guide your business towards greener pastures.

Staples Business Advantage is eager to serve as your sustainability coach. We have the tools, the products and a delightful way of working — all of which can help you achieve your green objectives.

And what would a good sustainability partner do earlier in the partnership? How about share our own corporate sustainability goals?

Staples Business Advantage is focused on delivering more sustainable products and solutions for our customers and operating our business in a responsible way.

Our Sustainability Goals

We're implementing an ambitious 5-year plan to improve our sustainability. By 2028 we expect to achieve:

35%

reduction in
operational carbon
emissions

70%

of suppliers set carbon
reduction targets

90%

diversion of waste to
recycling in our
fulfillment centers

The Environmental Summary Report



There's another big reason to partner with us. In our experience, proving that you're making sustainable choices is sometimes harder than making them.

That's why we provide our customer partners with an official Environmental Summary Report. This detailed appraisal provides you with insights into the eco penetration in your highest spend categories.

Our Environmental Summary Report is Informative, easy to read and really impressive in presentations to your C-suite.

The Key Takeaway

Sustainability in business requires commitment, innovation and continuous improvement. By setting clear, achievable goals and engaging your entire organization in the effort, you can ensure not only the resilience and success of your business but also contribute significantly to the health of our planet.

Remember, every business has a role to play in protecting the environment. Starting with specific, actionable sustainability goals can be the first step in a rewarding journey toward making a tangible difference.

The hardest part is starting and sticking with it, but the results are worth every effort.



Need help choosing the right sustainable break room products?

Contact your Staples Business Advantage Breakroom representative, and let us guide you through it.

Sustainability Resources

If you want to discover more ways to help your company reach its sustainability goals, check out the following links.



EPA Safer Choice

www.epa.gov/saferchoice

Safer Choice helps consumers, businesses, and purchasers find products that perform and contain ingredients that are safer for human health and the environment.



Energy Star®

www.energystar.gov

This site provides tips and strategies on how to reduce energy usage. It also includes a comprehensive directory of ENERGY STAR-certified products.



Watersense

www.epa.gov/watersense

Learn how you can save water in your workspace. The site houses a comprehensive directory of WaterSense-labeled plumbing fixtures.



Forest Stewardship Council (FSC)

www.fsc.org

This site promotes the responsible management of the world's forests. Find wood and paper-based products that are FSC-certified for your space.



The Sustainable Purchasing Leadership Council (SPLC)

www.sustainablepurchasing.org

SPLC is a global community of purchasers, suppliers, advocates, and experts committed to driving positive impact through the power of procurement



Green Seal

www.greenseal.gov

Green Seal is a non-for-profit organization that develops life cycle-based sustainability standards for products. Their criteria is especially useful in finding environmentally friendly cleaning products.

Sources

¹ Starting at the source: sustainability in supply chains McKinsey & Company

² Beyond checking the box - How to create business value with embedded sustainability. IBM Institute for Business Value

³ Costs and Benefits of Climate-Related Disclosure Activities by Corporate Issuers and Institutional Investors.

The SustainAbility Institute by ERM, 2023