

The Business Case for a Sustainability Manager



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GreenSpot inspires, educates, and recognizes businesses that adopt sustainable practices. It only takes one business to inspire many.

Sustainability Manager Position

Introduction:

Sustainability is defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.” (United Nations Sustainability Development Goals) This is applicable to large and small businesses as they strive to thrive in Columbus. Our city is committed to sustainability and providing tools--such as GreenSpot--to businesses, households, community groups, and neighborhoods to live and operate in a more environmentally-friendly manner. Columbus has a large pool of green talent from new graduates to seasoned environmental professionals. However, there are not enough positions for this talent and many leave the region. Businesses play a unique role in helping retain talented professionals in the field of sustainability.

No enterprise in the 21st century can ignore the new reality of increasingly extreme weather, expensive resources, volatile commodities, and mounting stakeholder pressure to act on climate and workers’ rights if they want to succeed. A business license to operate in a community can be impacted by their commitment to preserving clear air, water, and land while empowering their employees to live their best lives. Countries, businesses, and institutions are starting to ask more questions to potential partners about their supply chain impacts and carbon footprint. Organizations without data, goals, and progress to share will lose opportunities. But organizations that lean into sustainability will win opportunities and secure their position for decades to come.

The Sustainability Manager

A Sustainability Manager and sustainability team play a crucial role within any organization, helping to ensure it commits to an agenda that will lead to a secure future. Avoiding the depletion of resources, looking after the needs of future generations and planning economic viability are all important features of sustainability within a business. This team is integrated into all aspects of a business in order to maximize value. The team's work enhances investor confidence through strategic risk mitigation, builds customer loyalty through positive PR, and works toward operational efficiency and energy savings.

To learn more about starting a sustainability or green team and other business resources, please see GreenSpot's How-to Guide: <https://www.columbus.gov/greenspot/learn/sustainability-initiative-classes/>

“Working on sustainability projects is an exciting process that allows you to interact and engage amongst every level and department within an organization.”

*Kyle Gumto
Cardinal Health*

What does a Sustainability Manager do?

The role of a Sustainability Manager is a unique one. It is multifaceted, **helping to guarantee that a company upholds environmental standards and takes steps towards a greener future.** It is a role that implements strategies that reduce ecological damage and promote long-term sustainability. Categories of action include informing and engaging employees and clients, conserving and protecting water, conserving energy, reducing waste (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle), green transportation, and green cleaning.

Sustainability Managers take control of the development, implementation, promotion and monitoring of environmental strategies within an organization. Each of these four stages of the process hold considerable importance, with the Sustainability Manager leading the way in a vital process that helps to uphold environmental standards and innovate for future benefits.

Potential projects include:

- Renewable energy projects
- Energy efficiency projects
- Tracking and reporting Greenhouse Gas emissions
- Composting/recycling efforts
- Driving product redesign and reuse
- Improving fuel efficiency and using electric vehicles

The Sustainability Manager is frequently also responsible for managing a budget, liaising with marketing departments to promote a sustainability strategy, and communicating plans to directors, colleagues, stakeholders, vendors and customers. But these are responsibilities that can be grown with a new position.

Working within local authorities, national government bodies, corporate offices, consultancies, academic institutions or agencies, a Sustainability Manager holds an important and increasingly visible role in any organization that is required to manage and reduce waste and promote ecological sustainability.

“We care about this, our investors care about this, our customers care about this, our colleagues care about this, Huntington cares about this and that is why this position exists.”

Rebecca Karason
Huntington National Bank



The business benefits of recruiting a Sustainability Manager

The existence of a Sustainability Manager position, and going green can produce positive public relations. It is a clear demonstration that an organization or company taking steps to improve, recognize, address, and improve its environmental responsibility and cause less damage.

- The public perception of an environmental and social conscious company is often positive. Whether products are being adapted to be more environmentally friendly, or the reliance on energy supplies of a university or local council is being reduced thanks to the installation of solar panels, positive press releases can be sent out and customer loyalty or stakeholder investment may well improve. Environmental certification and awards can be applied for and, if achieved, promoted throughout the organization to encourage good practice and reward members of staff for the work they have achieved.
- Successes:
 - Ohio History Center saved more than **6.9 million kWh, 40,000 mcf of gas**, and more than **\$800,000** since adopting sustainable practices.
 - American Municipal Power saves more than **\$32,000 and 335,400 kWh annually** since adopting energy conservation actions and diverts **60,000 pounds** of material from the landfill.

- ProSource Wholesale Flooring, Kitchen and Bath offset 194.37 pounds of NOx and powered lightbulbs for 781,251 hours with solar panels.
- Nationwide Insurance saw a 20% reduction in water use after installing high efficient water fixtures.
- Cardinal Health converted a 400,000-plus square foot building and surrounding campus to LED lighting, saving more than 1,250 MWh and resulting in an annual reduction of more than 880 metric tons of CO₂e.
- **By reducing waste and encouraging** more positive environmental practices, money can be saved, and the improved public image could also lead to more sales, thanks to better PR.
- Recruiting a Sustainability Manager is an effective way to improve a company or organization's environmental profile. The expertise of somebody in this role cannot be underestimated, and the change they can effect is long-term and impressive.

Sustainability is a journey and no matter where your business is in that journey, there are plenty of resources like GreenSpot that can help you succeed.

*David R. Celebrezze
Columbus GreenSpot
Coordinator*

The skills and qualifications of a Sustainability Manager

This position must create solutions to solve complex problems. While no particular academic qualification is required for this role, many candidates have a degree in environmental science, engineering, sustainability, or business. The position can grow from an existing one or be created. An internal person or external one can help execute the duties.

Skills and qualifications:

- An **understanding** of the company's culture;
- An understanding of ways departments interact;
- **Attention to detail** so one change does not contradict another sustainability goal;
- Being able to **identify inefficiencies** and problems;
- **Creative thinking** to develop innovative ways to meet the demands of the role.
- **Flexibility** to reassess past decisions to determine their relevance.
- A passion for sustainability and the environment is a must.

The role of Sustainability Manager is one of continual updating and reassessment, if an effective sustainability strategy is to be truly successful

Organizational sustainability is not just about mitigating risk, it's about enhanced value creation, long-term cost savings, talent retention, public health, and community prosperity.

Alex Slaymaker

The Columbus Partnership/ Smart Columbus

The Responsibilities of a Sustainability Manager

- Analyzing the current practices of an organization and identifying areas where environmental sustainability could be improved.
- Identifying key performance indicators (KPIs) to establish how the organization will know whether important sustainability targets have been met.
- Measuring the performance of the organization's current sustainability practices to have a benchmark from which to improve.
- Planning and developing a strategy to improve environmental sustainability within an organization.
- Initiating a course of action so that sustainability metrics are gathered and recorded over time, to measure and chart improvements.
- Drive internal and external reporting on projects, responding to customer and investor requests and ESG Surveys.
- Track and report GHG emissions, reduction projects, energy usage, energy saving projects.
- Track cost savings on projects.

“Sustainability is vital to every single organization. When we are looking at hiring and associate employee retention we find they care about sustainability.”

Allegra Wiesler
OhioHealth



- Work towards supporting UN Sustainability Goals.
- Work with external audits and verification process for GHG emission validation.
- Drive energy saving projects, energy audits, energy purchases, renewable energy projects, etc.
- Communicating strategy to colleagues, customers, stakeholders, and vendors in a way that is easy to understand.
- Working with other departments to open lines of communication about changes that will be implemented and the impact they will have on the workplace and the environment.
- Analyzing results on an ongoing basis to effectively audit an organization's progress and identify areas that need continuing improvement.
- Periodically reassessing work that has already been done to determine its effectiveness.
- Liaising with colleagues, directors and experts to gain valuable expertise from third parties.
- Ongoing training and certification.



Resources

There are support networks for sustainability managers in the Columbus region. Below are a couple that can help your sustainability manager advance in greening the organization.

GreenSpot Sustainable Business Course

This course provides a peer to peer learning forum where participants share successes and challenges of sustainability. The focus is on examples of documented cost savings and other benefits. The course consists of six sessions covering an introduction, informing and engaging clients and staff, conserving water, conserving energy, reducing waste, and green transportation/green cleaning. The participating organizations “graduate” and are recognized at the Annual GreenSpotLight Awards Celebration. There is no cost associated with this program. More than 50 organizations large and small have graduated. Contact GreenSpot to participate or learn more information GreenSpot@columbus.gov.



From our Partners

Portions of this guide were taken with permission from Principle People (UK).

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