

What is an Environmental Sustainability Plan?

An environmental sustainability plan is a strategic document, supported by the organization's management, that outlines how a community will operate over the long term in a sustainable and economically viable manner, with a primary focus on reducing its environmental impact and addressing the effects of climate change.

Each community's Sustainability Plan should be tailored to its unique circumstances and based on a comprehensive assessment of existing conditions. This may include calculating the community's carbon footprint and evaluating energy use, water consumption, waste management, transportation systems, energy conservation, greenhouse gas (GHG) reduction, purchasing practices, land use, and climatic resiliency.

The plan components listed below are intended to be suggestive, not prescriptive. Not all topics need to be addressed to produce a worthwhile plan. An initial plan could focus on the most important areas first. Other elements could be addressed later.

Plans should be actionable and list specific tasks, establish timelines, assign responsibilities, spell out methods of assessing progress, and estimate costs for at least near-term tasks. In addition, the plan should include: 1) short- and long-term goals, and 2) implementation strategies based on transparent interactions among board members, residents, all levels of staff, and governmental and non-governmental groups in the local community.

The Role of Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment

SSAFE's mission and organizational focus is on environmental actions designed to reduce contributions to climate change and preserve the natural environment. The purpose of this document is to highlight the environmental planning and execution aspects of a senior living community's efforts to combat global warming and promote a sustainable living environment. We recognize that there are many other critical aspects of operating an effective senior living community, including promoting the health and wellness and social engagement of community residents, recruiting and retaining qualified staff, and employing sound financial management practices.

Key Components of a Senior Living Community's Environmental Sustainability Plan

- 1. Energy Efficiency and Greenhouse Gas Reduction:** Identify energy/emissions reduction measures (ERMs) that will be necessary to eliminate or greatly reduce the community's carbon footprint. Retrofit buildings where possible for lower energy use. A tabulation of the probable effect of different ERMs and the total potential reduction in the carbon footprint is desirable. A rough estimate of probable costs is also desirable if it can be obtained. An energy audit is often a part of this effort. Consider the adoption of LEED, ENERGY STAR, or other sustainable building certifications for new construction and major renovations.

Senior Stewards Acting for the Environment

2. **Land Use and Habitat:** Support biodiversity and reduce GHG emissions by using native plants, restoring natural landscapes, removing invasive species, conserving open space, creating pollinator gardens, adapting to changes in climatic conditions. and transitioning to electric landscaping equipment.
3. **Sustainable Purchasing:** Emphasize the procurement of goods and services with a lower carbon footprint such as low-carbon food and building materials that reduce environmental impact and minimize GHG emissions.
4. **Sustainable Transportation:** Encourage transition to electric vehicles for community operations, install EV charging stations (Level 1–3), and explore shared transportation models that reduce vehicle use and emissions.
5. **Waste Reduction:** Promote recycling, reuse, re-purposing, composting, and responsible procurement practices.
6. **Water Conservation:** Identify measures to reduce water usage and improve management of stormwater runoff.

A senior living community also should have a climate resiliency plan that includes measures to maintain safe living conditions during disruptions to utilities and major services. The plan may be a component of, or separate from, the community's sustainability plan and include an assessment of climate-related risks such as extreme heat, storms, wildfires, and power outages.

Plan Implementation Factors

1. **Community Engagement:** Create opportunities for residents to participate in meaningful ways in the preparation and implementation of the community's environmental sustainability plan.
2. **Collaboration:** Maintain open, transparent communications among residents, board members, and staff throughout the planning and execution process, including regular progress reports and discussions among all interested parties.
3. **Performance Metrics:** Track progress through key performance indicators such as energy use per resident, waste diversion rates, or resident satisfaction.
4. **Continuous Improvement:** Periodically review and update the community's environmental sustainability plan to reflect new technologies, laws, regulations, resident needs or other considerations.