



# Guide to incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into operations at U.S. universities

This resource guide presents options for universities to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their operations by assessing how they align with the SDGs and implementing programs based on those findings.

*It is a part of a series of guides for U.S. universities interested in engaging with the SDGs. The full series can be found [here](#).*

## Getting started: Assess how the SDGs are addressed through operations at your university

Operations may consist of offices such as human resources, building management, budgeting, student services, dining, and others that are managed by the university. Some additional areas you may want to explore outside of university-led operations include student groups and volunteer projects. General approaches to assessing how your operations align with the SDGs include desk reviews, staff surveys, and group discussions. These approaches are most effective when they are employed together as complementary efforts. As the SDGs are broad, starting your analysis at the more descriptive [SDG target level](#) can help capture the granularity of your operations. Keep in mind that this process can be just as valuable as the final product. You will likely uncover unexpected connections, identify possible opportunities for action, and connect with potential allies across your institution to close sustainability gaps.

<b>Approach 1: Conduct desk review of existing documentation of the university's operations to determine how they align with the SDGs</b>	
<b>Benefits</b>	This process will not place an additional burden on university staff whose work is already documented and can save time that would be spent searching for more detailed information.
<b>How to get started</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Identify key documentation such as strategic plans and reports, campus surveys, and assessments related to equity, the environment, and economic impact.</li> <li>See if your institution has participated in the <a href="#">Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education Sustainability Tracking, Assessment &amp; Rating System</a> reporting or the <a href="#">Times Higher Education Impact Rankings</a>, which include SDG analyses.</li> </ul>

<b>Approach 2: Survey staff to learn how they are addressing the SDGs in their work</b>	
<b>Benefits</b>	Surveys enable you to collect information quickly using fewer resources.
<b>How to get started</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore how your university normally facilitates surveys.</li> <li>• Create a questionnaire asking questions about the SDGs and how they are related to a department's operations and the central administration's activities.</li> <li>• Offer an incentive to encourage participation, such as a gift card or other small giveaway.</li> </ul>

<b>Approach 3: Organize group discussions with staff to discuss how their work aligns with the SDGs</b>	
<b>Benefits</b>	This process brings together different parts of the university to think about how their work is connected to sustainability. It may also lead to insights that inform future plans and can help establish new relationships across the university.
<b>How to get started</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Join existing departmental meetings to introduce and discuss the SDGs in relation to each department's work. Consider reviewing how the SDGs relate to groups before speaking with them in order to inform your discussions.</li> <li>• Once departments have a sense of how their work is related to the SDGs, identify or organize additional opportunities for different departments to discuss where there is potential to collaborate.</li> </ul>

### **Next steps: Implement programs that meet your university's goals**

Based on this analysis, you can explore programming options that meet your institution's goals for engaging with the SDGs. Here are some examples of what other U.S. universities have implemented.

<b>Elevate SDG champions</b>	Recognize students, faculty, and staff through certificates, awards, and prizes to demonstrate the many ways you can contribute to the SDGs and inspire the community to do more.
<b>Create programs and places for sustainability</b>	Designate a campus space for students, faculty, and staff to connect across the SDGs, like the <a href="#">Carnegie Mellon University's Sustainability Studio</a> , and launch a programming initiative such as the one by <a href="#">North Carolina State University</a> to encourage your community to take action.
<b>Centralize SDG information</b>	Centralize your analysis so that other institutions, local authorities, and organizations can find potential partners, like the <a href="#">University of Minnesota Duluth campus SDG map</a> that includes both university and community activities mapped to the SDGs.
<b>Incorporate the SDGs into strategies</b>	Incorporate the SDGs into plans and strategies to demonstrate the links with university operations and identify opportunities for action, such as the <a href="#">University of Minnesota MPact 2025 Systemwide Strategic Plan</a> .