

How to Create your Sustainability Mission Statement





Introduction

Getting started in sustainability can be overwhelming and daunting. There are so many factors to consider and it can all seem a bit complicated at times.

That's why setting a sustainability mission statement is so important. Having a clear picture about what your business is trying to achieve from the outset is going to help keep you on track by focusing your efforts on what's really important.

This guide will help you create your sustainability mission statement to set you up for success.

Let's get started!

Step 1 – Who are you?

Before you can start thinking about your sustainability mission statement, you need to take a step back and do a bit of self-reflection. Who are you as a business? What is your purpose?

Understanding your overall objectives, your values, and the context in which you're operating will help you when it comes time to talk about your sustainability program.

Exercise | Looking within

Most companies are established out of a desire to do something useful. It might be a product that makes people's lives easier or more enjoyable, enables us to work better, or a service that keeps us healthy or entertains us. Every business has a core purpose. No purpose means no customers.

Try answering the following questions about your business:

1. What is my purpose?
2. What role do I play in the community?

To help you answer the above, use some of these prompt questions:

- Why should we exist?
- What purpose are we fulfilling?
- At the core of our existence, what are we trying to do?
- What problem or challenge are we solving?

If your first answer is "To make money", then keep digging. There's always more to it.

If you're stuck, the best place to start is by asking the founder (assuming you have access to them). Otherwise, if your company has a vision statement, you might find your purpose there or in a business tagline.

Write your answers down so you can refer to them later on.



Step 2 – What are your challenges?

Every business faces challenges that could have a lasting impact on its future success. Sometimes we can't predict what these challenges might be – i.e. a global pandemic. But there are many environmental issues like climate change, or social movements like Black Lives Matter or #MeToo that are growing in importance. Your business needs to think through what impacts these kinds of global trends might have so you can take them into account in your sustainability planning.

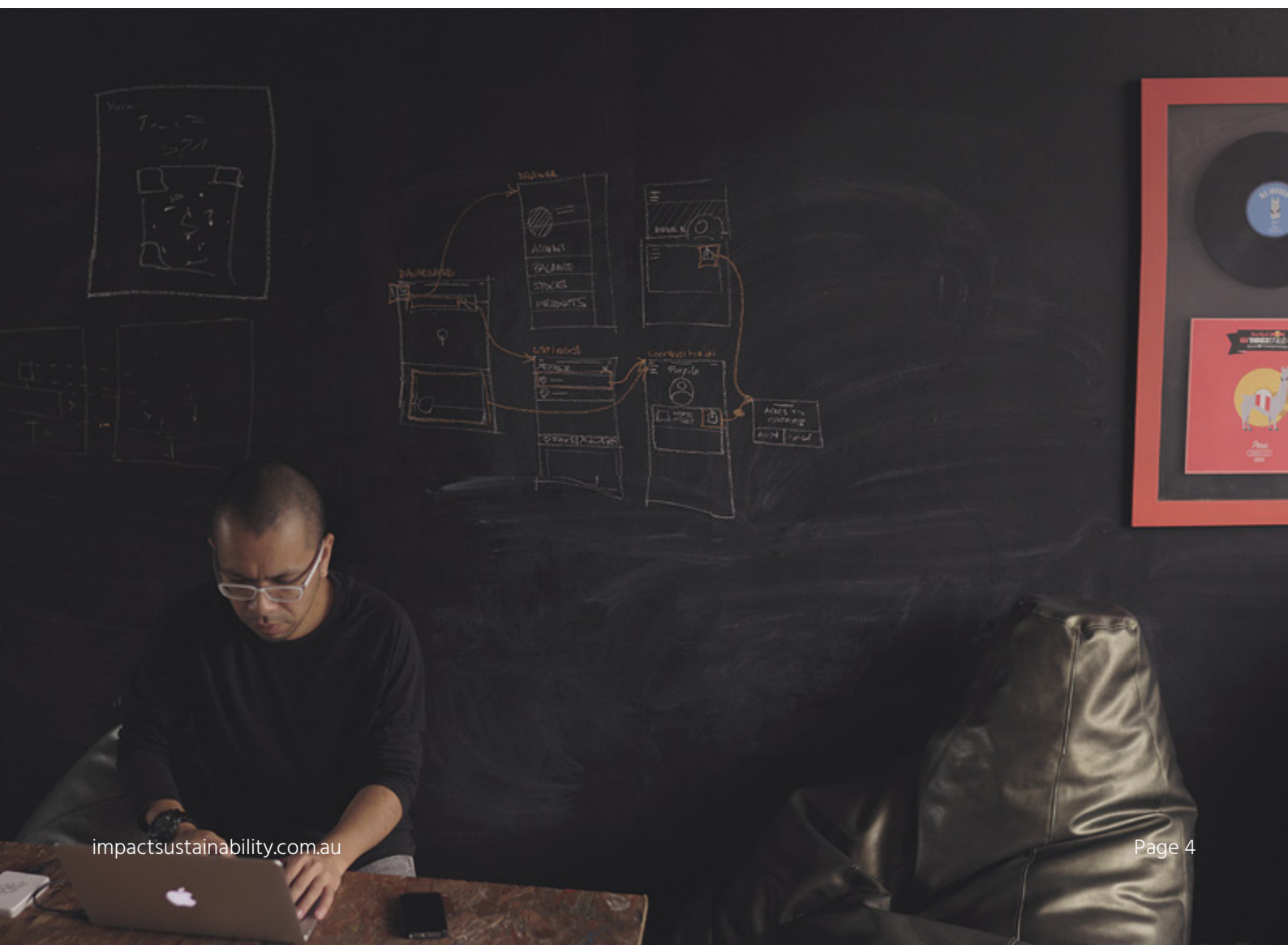
This exercise is designed to help you consider the issues, challenges or trends that your business may encounter in the future. This will help you understand how environmental and social factors can contribute to the success or failure of your business in the future unless you have a solid sustainability strategy.

Exercise | Forward planning

Consider the following questions for your business:

- What are the biggest future environmental challenges that could impact you?
- What are the biggest social challenges that could impact you?
- What are the biggest economic challenges that could impact you?

You might notice that you have a tendency to relate the majority of challenges and opportunities to how they affect your bottom line. But there may also be environmental or social factors involved. Societal problems are complex so it might be hard to classify them. But don't stress about which one to choose. The aim of the exercise is to get you thinking about how your company operates within a broader environmental, social, and economic structure which can often feel like it's out of your control. A successful business is a resilient business. It plans ahead for what challenges might be on the horizon.



Step 3 – Where are you heading?

Now... imagine you just got into a time machine and arrived 20 years in the future. We're now in the 2040s, and all of the issues you identified in the last task have happened.

Exercise | Looking to the future

Using your discussions from the previous exercise, consider the following questions for your business in the future:

- How did you survive? What actions did you take?
- Why did you survive? How did you make sure you weren't making the issues worse?
- What would the future look like if you don't exist? What would be missing?
- What does your business look like now? What's different? What's the same?



Step 4 – What are you doing now?

It's highly possible that you're already doing some sustainability practices in your business but you may not even realise it because you think about them as regular, everyday operations. Now's the time to give yourself a well-earned pat on the back and recognise what you're doing well.

Identifying these things that are already happening organically will show you where the energy is and areas where you can get quick wins and engagement.

Exercise | Identifying success and opportunity

Make a list of the good things you're already doing or any opportunities that already exist for your business in the sustainability space.

Some examples might be:

- Already having some targets set
- Implementing a recycling and waste management program
- Purchasing green power
- Introducing an employee green team



Step 5– What’s your mission?

There’s no right or wrong way to write your sustainability strategy, but it should bring together the key themes you’ve covered in the previous exercises. Your mission statement should summarise what your business aspires to be in the future and how it will contribute to creating a more sustainable world.

Exercise | Writing your mission statement

Now it’s time to summarise and write the outline of your sustainability strategy.

To do this we recommend researching what other businesses within your sector are doing. Consider:

- What is their approach to sustainability?
- What priorities have they identified?

This can help you to see what they’re doing well, where there might be gaps, or what you can do to become a sustainability leader if that’s your ultimate goal.

Throughout the process, it’s important to keep the following in mind:

- Is your mission statement aligned with your business purpose?
- Have you considered your vision for issues that might arise for your business, and will the strategy allow you to overcome them?
- Does your strategy align with your business and its natural progression and future interests?

You can use the following structure to help you form your mission statement.

Reframe your purpose and reason for existence. What are you trying to achieve?	“[Business]’s mission is...
What is your company doing to survive into the future? How are you achieving the above?	...in ways that... ...enabling... ...to create... ...to encourage...
How your company will ultimately benefit the community?	...so that...”

For example, Impact Sustainability’s mission statement is:

“At Impact Sustainability our mission is to provide simple solutions to lower the barriers to effective action, enabling sustainability strategy to become the essential tool for business success; so that the transformation to a low carbon and regenerative economy is led by business.”

You may need to brainstorm different options along the way and test multiple versions when you reach the stakeholder communications module to reach a final mission statement that feels right for your business.

Whats Next?

Now that you've created a sustainability mission statement, you're ready to develop a holistic sustainability strategy. Using these results, you'll be ready to start a 'materiality assessment' to identify the areas that are most relevant to you and to your stakeholders. This will give you the bones of a strategy that suits your business. If you would like support on this next step, contact us to find out how we can help!

If you already have your key issues identified and you're ready to move into setting goals and measuring your performance, take a look at our [How to Measure Your Impact Guide](#) for some pointers.





Get in touch

If you want to learn more about how we can support you through the next steps of your developing your sustainability action plan, contact us at info@impactsustainability.com.au