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Sustainability checklist

Being sustainable is about making positive changes in your business for the planet and people around you. It helps you stay resilient and meet the growing demand for products and services that do no harm. Our checklist guides you through some steps you can take towards sustainability.

1 Plan for sustainability

Sustainability isn't something you do once. It's a commitment you make to continue improving over time. As with any changes to your business, it's good to plan ahead.

Developing a sustainability action plan helps you to:

- understand how sustainable your business is now
- set achievable objectives and targets so you know where you're going
- evaluate different actions you can take that work for you
- develop policies to support you and your employees
- develop a statement about your progress to share with people.

It can be a simple document, as long as it's specific and clear. Or you can use an environmental, social and governance (ESG) framework to plan, measure and report how your business impacts society and the environment.

Whichever method you use, update your plan at least once a year.

[Download our free template to help guide you on your sustainability journey.](https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/develop-your-sustainability-action-plan) (<https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/develop-your-sustainability-action-plan>)

→ Develop your sustainability action plan

[Learn about ESG and how to use it in your business.](https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/use-environmental-social-and-governance-esg-practices-in-your-business) (<https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/use-environmental-social-and-governance-esg-practices-in-your-business>)

→ Use environmental, social and governance (ESG) practices in your business

2 Reduce your greenhouse gas emissions

Greenhouse gas emissions harm the climate. Once you know where your emissions come from, you can find ways reduce them. The main source of emissions for businesses tends to be burning fossil fuels for electricity, heat and transport.

Identify your emissions by calculating:

- direct emissions from your business that are within your control such as the gas for your hot water system or the fuel for your vehicle
- indirect emissions from your business such as the energy you buy from the grid
- indirect emissions your customers and supply chain generate such as external laundry providers or produce transporters.

Offset carbon

If you can't reduce your emissions, consider [carbon offsets](https://www.climateactive.org.au/what-climate-active/carbon-offsets) (<https://www.climateactive.org.au/what-climate-active/carbon-offsets>).

3 Assess sustainability risks

A risk assessment is about looking at what might harm your business and prevent you from achieving your goals.

An assessment looks at risks that relate to sustainability including:

- global environmental and social challenges
- your impact on the environment and society
- what happens if you don't try to be sustainable
- challenges you face in being sustainable.

Reassess risks and review your plan to minimise them at least once a year.

[Learn to plan for the risks your business may face.](https://business.gov.au/risk-management/risk-assessment-and-planning/assess-and-manage-risk) (<https://business.gov.au/risk-management/risk-assessment-and-planning/assess-and-manage-risk>)

→ Assess and manage risk

4 Manage your energy, water and waste

There are ways you can manage your energy, water and waste to save money and protect the environment. Consider small steps you can take now and bigger changes you can make over time.

[Learn how to make your business more energy efficient.](https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/manage-energy-use) (<https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/manage-energy-use>)

→ Manage energy use

[Understand your business waste and the rules you need to follow.](https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/manage-business-waste) (<https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/manage-business-waste>)

→ Manage business waste

[Find ways to reuse and recycle water and identify signs of a water leak.](https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/manage-water-use) (<https://business.gov.au/environmental-management/manage-water-use>)

→ Manage water use

5 Choose your suppliers carefully

If you're not sure how sustainable your supply chain is, you might support unsustainable practices without meaning to. It also puts you at risk of misrepresenting your sustainability, which can cost you a big fine and damage your brand.

Ask suppliers what they're doing to be sustainable. Depending on their responses, you may want to:

- find opportunities to work with them to align to your sustainability goals
- support them to improve their sustainability – for example, by developing sustainable packaging in exchange for more business
- find alternative suppliers that better align with your values.

[Learn how to choose suppliers who align with your sustainability values. \(https://business.gov.au/people/suppliers\)](https://business.gov.au/people/suppliers)

→ Suppliers

6 Be a fair and inclusive employer

A sustainable business cares for the people it employs by:

- honouring their [pay, leave and entitlements \(https://business.gov.au/people/employees/employees-pay-leave-and-entitlements\)](https://business.gov.au/people/employees/employees-pay-leave-and-entitlements)
- protecting them from bullying, discrimination and sexual harassment
- creating a healthy work environment – for example with good ventilation, natural lighting and ergonomic furniture
- following rules for [work health and safety \(https://business.gov.au/risk-management/health-and-safety/work-health-and-safety\)](https://business.gov.au/risk-management/health-and-safety/work-health-and-safety)
- supporting [equal opportunity and diversity \(https://business.gov.au/people/employees/equal-opportunity-and-diversity\)](https://business.gov.au/people/employees/equal-opportunity-and-diversity).

Sustainability is a team effort. Beyond creating fair work conditions, a sustainable business also brings its employees on the journey.

Explain to your team why sustainability is important and what you need them to do. Consider creating a new role to drive sustainability, such as a chief sustainability officer or sustainability manager. If it's a voluntary role on top of someone's current role, make sure you give them enough time to do what they need to do.

7 Support your local community

You can create positive social change beyond the products and services you offer. Social sustainability is about making sure communities can exist in a healthy, fair and equal way. It can start with your business supporting your local community.

Some things you can do for your community include:

- boosting the local economy by employing people and suppliers in your area
- contributing to causes such as conservation, cultural or sporting groups.

Support doesn't need to be financial – you can volunteer your time or services too.

8 Build your sustainability credentials

Sustainability standards and certifications are voluntary guidelines you can follow. They help you show people you have good environmental and social practices.

There are many different ones to choose from, so do your research first. You may need to pay a fee but it can be a good investment for your brand.

Be climate active

If you're going carbon neutral, consider [certification with Climate Active](https://www.climateactive.org.au/be-climate-active/certification) (<https://www.climateactive.org.au/be-climate-active/certification>).

9 Get help and support

Sustainability looks different for each business. You can reach out to other businesses to ask what they do and see if they can give you some ideas. For guidance specific to your business you might be able to [chat to an adviser](https://business.gov.au/expertise-and-advice) (<https://business.gov.au/expertise-and-advice>).

Check if you can apply for [grants and programs for sustainability](https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs) (<https://business.gov.au/grants-and-programs>).

Read next

[Find out how to communicate your sustainability claims to your customers.](https://business.gov.au/marketing-and-advertising/promote-your-sustainable-business) (<https://business.gov.au/marketing-and-advertising/promote-your-sustainable-business>)

→ Promote your sustainable business