

## Sustainability Institute Two-Year Strategic Plan

Penn State is a public research university that educates students from Pennsylvania, the nation and the world, and improves the well-being and health of individuals and communities through integrated programs of teaching, research, and service. The University has embraced sustainability as a foundational principle that enriches all of its pursuits and missions, and is committed to advancing the understanding and resolution of sustainability challenges on campus, in our communities and around the world.

The Sustainability Institute (SI) was created to lead Penn State toward the university's sustainability mission: a comprehensive integration of sustainability into the University's research, teaching, outreach, and operations that prepares students, faculty, and staff to be sustainability leaders in their professional, personal, and civic lives.

### **Mission**

The Sustainability Institute's mission is to lead and support Penn State in the pursuit of sustainability across all functions (teaching and learning, research and discovery, outreach and engagement, administration and operations).

We achieve this mission by developing lifetime competencies for sustainability in our faculty, staff, and students; enabling transformation and alignment of systems, policies, and opportunities around sustainability; inspiring others through the communication of our successes, failures, and learning; and demonstrating the value of this approach at the individual, institutional, and global scales.

### **Values**

**Proactive Servant Leadership** - *We lead and support the integration of sustainability into the practices of those we serve through action, in a manner aligned with the mission of our institution, and that increases its long-term resilience and health.*

**Humble Listening** - *We actively listen to students, faculty, and staff to identify barriers to action and knowledge gaps, and act on that information by reducing institutional barriers to individual change, sharing existing and new knowledge broadly and quickly, and directing resources toward filling knowledge needs.*

**Evidence-Based Action** - *We prepare for our work, build it upon existing knowledge, pursue it with rigor, and are accountable for its quality and outcomes.*

**Strategic Risk-Taking** - *We utilize a systems approach in the use of human and material resources, applying them strategically and respectfully, and seek a full understanding of costs.*

**Collaborative Inquiry** - *We acknowledge foundational knowledge, action, success, and failure as vital contributions to learning, and commit to being a learning community that can inspire others to do the same.*

## **Core Competencies**

Our primary core competency is that we are a cross-functional institute uniquely capable of forming and convening strategic partnerships to lead change toward sustainability in service to the University. Specifically this means that we:

**Interpret** - We recognize trends, issues, and opportunities and make a compelling case for sustainability;

**Link** - We facilitate connection between formerly disconnected people, groups, and resources so that potential synergies can be realized;

**Leverage** - We apply our capacity where the highest impact will result by focusing work on key “people levers” such as leaders and on “institutional levers” such as priorities, principles, policies, and metrics;

**Elevate** - We raise to a higher state and/or level of visibility others’ work through communications, facilitation, and support;

**Co-create** - We engage with Penn State faculty, students, administrators, and staff to plan and deliver value both to the institution and to these constituent groups; and

**Provide feedback** - We systematically gather data to assess the scope and effectiveness of the institution’s adoption of sustainability and feed this information back to inform plans, policies, processes, and actions.

## **Two-Year Strategic Horizon and Vision**

Through the execution of this strategic plan, we will transition from an organization that represents the functional areas of the institution to one that demonstrates the value of an integrated approach to transformation of systems, policies, and opportunities around sustainability. This integrated approach will lay a firm foundation for the continued evolution of Penn State as a Living Lab for sustainability and an example of what is uniquely possible at a large institution of higher education.

### **Goal 1: Build Capacity and Provide Opportunities for Practice**

*In five years: Foster a collaborative culture that invites all Penn Staters to participate in expanding curricular and non-curricular opportunities for students to develop lifetime competencies in sustainability.*

*In two years: Establish sustainability competencies, a support system for effectively integrating sustainability into learning and living, and a framework for structuring pilot sustainability initiatives.*

**Objective 1.1: Develop competencies and explore assessment tools that can guide the development and adoption of sustainability practices and curricula.**

**Strategy 1.1.1:** Draw on expertise from across and outside of the University to develop sustainability competencies for a variety of audiences.

**Strategy 1.1.2:** Work with faculty, staff, and students from across the campuses to explore appropriate assessment models for these sustainability competencies.

**Strategy 1.1.3:** Collaborate with faculty, staff and student units to develop a platform to engage and measure sustainable practices across the University.

**Objective 1.2: Create a support system that fosters the incorporation of sustainability into the curriculum in ways that provide theoretical and experiential learning opportunities for students.**

**Strategy 1.2.1:** Design, develop, and implement faculty development opportunities for all Penn State campuses that help faculty members to incorporate best practices for sustainability education and engaged scholarship into their courses.

**Strategy 1.2.2:** Explore a partnership with Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence, the Council for Engaged Scholarship, and other appropriate units to create a faculty development program that links engaged scholarship with sustainability.

**Strategy 1.2.3:** Support academic departments, colleges, and campuses that request assistance with incorporating sustainability into their curricula in conjunction with their unit-level strategic planning.

**Strategy 1.2.4:** Support the inclusion of sustainability in new general education requirements by providing information and advice as needed to the General Education Task Force.

**Strategy 1.2.5:** Fortify the Sustainability Leadership Minor by raising its institutional visibility, expanding its presence across commonwealth campuses, increasing student enrollments, codifying administrative procedures for students and faculty, and ensuring the rigor of its academic programs.

**Objective 1.3: Create a support system that fosters the ability of staff members and students to adopt sustainable practices in their work and personal lives.**

**Strategy 1.3.1:** Develop and host gatherings of Green Teams, faculty leaders and

sustainability-focused student co-curricular organizations to support peer-to-peer education efforts.

**Strategy 1.3.2:** Work with the Office of Admissions to incorporate sustainability into prospective student information and tours, and into New Student Orientation.

**Objective 1.4: Establish relationships to connect academic and theoretical approaches to sustainability with applied projects on campus and in the broader community.**

**Strategy 1.4.1:** Further develop and refine the Sustainable Communities Collaborative model to provide a support system for connecting faculty members and students to local community sustainability projects, through partnerships with the Borough of State College and its region.

**Strategy 1.4.2:** Adapt the model of the Sustainable Communities Collaborative to a “Sustainable Campus Collaborative,” establishing relationships that connect faculty, staff, and students to projects that enhance the sustainability of the University campuses.

**Strategy 1.4.3:** Conceptualize and create a plan, including timeline and funding sources, for institutionalizing Sustainable Communities Collaboratives and Sustainability Campus Collaboratives across the Commonwealth.

**Objective 1.5: Develop a maturity model framework for pilot projects and programs and institutionalize existing successful Institute pilot programs.**

**Strategy 1.5.1:** Create a framework to identify gaps that could be addressed by pilot projects or programs. Determine the thresholds that are required to incubate and graduate or discontinue pilot efforts.

**Strategy 1.5.2:** Transfer Eco-Reps program leadership to another University entity, as possible. Situate Eco-Reps curriculum materials on the student-centered electronic portal.

**Strategy 1.5.3:** Working with the Employee Engagement in Sustainability Committee, explore ways to transform Green Teams from an Institute-effort intensive program to a distributed leadership model.

**Strategy 1.5.4:** Provide research and recommendations to Penn State entities (Vice President for Research, Office of Physical Plant, Environmental Health and Safety) regarding the establishment of a green labs initiative for their consideration.

**Strategy 1.5.5:** Transfer administration of Sustainability Leadership Minor from Old Main to the Institute, and identify additional Penn State personnel who will coordinate and administer the minor.

**Strategy 1.5.6:** Identify and recruit non-Institute faculty as instructors for SUST 200 and

**Goal 2: Enable transformation and alignment of systems, policies, and opportunities around sustainability**

*In five years: Achieve full integration of sustainability into the Pennsylvania State University as evidenced by the setting of long-term measurable goals, significant investment in innovation, establishment of mature measurement systems, and alignment of cornerstone systems and policies.*

*In two years: Sustainability is embedded in institutional planning with established high-level goals and strategic funding is in place to reward and elevate innovations.*

**Objective 2.1: Integrate sustainability into institutional strategic planning as evidenced by its permanent place as an organizing principle/value, measurable institutional goals, and metrics we track and report on publicly.**

**Strategy 2.1.1:** Support unit-level strategic planning by providing tools and resources to facilitate the integration of sustainability into goals, objectives, and strategies.

**Strategy 2.1.2:** Support institutional strategic planning and the establishment of sustainability goals in collaboration with key partners.

**Strategy 2.1.3:** Assess and track the University's sustainability performance and make the information easily accessible through the production of an annual Penn State Sustainability Report/Prospectus.

**Objective 2.2: Demonstrate the value of investments in transformational sustainability collaborations and secure increased investment in the Reinvention Fund.**

**Strategy 2.2.1:** Build a strong management and administrative foundation for the Reinvention Fund utilizing the results of project and process assessments in Objective 2.3.

**Strategy 2.2.2:** Administer the Reinvention Fund in a way that instructs and informs the advancement of Penn State's capacity to collaborate across functional units in key sustainability themes.

**Strategy 2.2.3:** Broadly share results of Reinvention Fund through communications, publications and materials that support the attraction of new investment.

**Objectives 2.3: Systematically collect evidence of institutional barriers and opportunities related to the full realization of sustainability integration across functions and units of the University.**

**Strategy 2.3.1:** Conduct assessments of Goal 2 initiatives such as unit-level planning and Reinvention Fund to ensure proper documentation, organizational learning, process improvement, and the sharing of effective models with other institutions.

**Strategy 2.3.2:** Disseminate key results of Goal 2 initiatives to University leadership using the assessment data and evidence collected through rigorous evaluation of investments.

### **Goal 3: Inspire Others**

*In five years: Establish national and international recognition for Penn State as a recognized model and source of inspiration for institutional transformation of a large university around sustainability*

*In two years: Showcase the spectrum of existing sustainability stories and resources to inspire and empower new sustainability activities and practitioners at all of the University's campuses, research centers, and 30 million square feet of facilities.*

**Objective 3.1: Elevate Penn State's sustainability story to play a significant role in the institution's overall success story.**

**Strategy 3.1.1:** Produce, promote, and share news stories that illustrate the connection between human health and happiness, environmental quality, and economic well-being.

**Strategy 3.1.2:** Develop and maintain an online media strategy including an electronic portal, social media platforms, and e-newsletter.

**Strategy 3.1.3:** Develop building and campus signage highlighting place-based sustainability and creating an immersive space for sustainability education.

**Objective 3.2: Create a comprehensive, systematic, and curated repository of sustainability tools that support action by our stakeholders.**

**Strategy 3.2.1:** Provide portal-delivered courses, databases, events, funding opportunities, and workbooks, as available.

**Strategy 3.2.2:** Develop, deliver, and market the Field Guide for Teaching Sustainability.

**Strategy 3.3.3:** Convene student groups and the Student Sustainability Advisory Council (SSAC) to share best practices on promoting sustainability via the development of a student-centered electronic portal.

**Objective 3.3: Communicate the value, impact, and learnings of Penn State's sustainability efforts (including the Sustainability Institute) as an inspirational, instructive, and unique case study in higher education.**

**Strategy 3.3.1:** Showcase and document the projects and outputs of the Reinvention Fund, Sustainable Communities Collaborative, Unit-Level Strategic Planning, and other SI-led

initiatives.

**Strategy 3.3.2:** Develop a specific Living Lab portal with examples and tools for connecting academics with operations and the community.

**Strategy 3.3.3:** Develop and distribute an annual report of the institution's sustainability progress.

#### **Goal 4: Excel Organizationally**

*In five years: We identify the means by which value is created, codify it in an operational plan that demonstrates value at the individual, institutional, and global scales, and continually refine it through testing, assessment, and learning. It becomes a model for large institutions of higher learning.*

*In two years: We lay a strong foundation for the Institute by designing and implementing: 1) a structure that serves our work with defined roles and responsibilities for all of our members, 2) long-term financial and intellectual resourcing strategies, including the use of physical assets, 3) strong partnerships with internal and external advisory boards that leverage their added expertise, and 4) decision-making criteria for projects and initiatives that effectively focuses our efforts.*

**Objective 4.1: Establish a structure and culture that offers ample opportunity for engagement and high order utilization of expertise and capacity.**

**Strategy 4.1.1:** Define an organizational structure that supports our work, including clear descriptions of the necessary roles and responsibilities within it.

**Strategy 4.1.2:** Develop individual professional development plans for all SI staff members.

**Strategy 4.1.3:** Build a culture of pace and balance in our work through a combination of co-creation and decision-making.

**Objective 4.2: Utilize both internal and external expertise in a way that continually builds communities of practice and elevates our work.**

**Executive Council** – We will engage our Executive Council in dialogue about strategic opportunities and challenges associated with advancing sustainability at Penn State and provide them regular, timely updates on the work of the SI and the University's progress on Sustainability Strategic Plan implementation.

**Strategy 4.2.1:** Meet with Executive Council members individually and as a group on a quarterly basis for reporting, discussion, and guidance.

**Strategy 4.2.2:** Identify, and gain their insights on, pressing strategic issues associated with the advancement of sustainability at Penn State.

***External Advisory Board*** – We will consult with external advisors who have various types of sustainability expertise and have agreed to offer their time, talents, and/or resources in order to strengthen the work of the SI.

**Strategy 4.2.3:** Convene semi-annual in-person or virtual meetings with External Advisory Board members for input and feedback.

**Strategy 4.2.4:** Establish a governance structure for the External Advisory Board to include charter, member terms of service, governance, expectations, etc.

**Objective 4.3: Set institutional-level goals that create focus and pull for sustainability activity.**

**Strategy 4.3.1:** Work with Executive Council members to establish a process for the setting of high-level institutional sustainability goals both near- and long-term.

**Strategy 4.3.2:** Build a coalition of faculty, staff, students, administrators, community members, and alumni to support and inform that process, utilizing a Living Lab approach.

**Objective 4.4 Assess and strategically elevate the institutional value of Penn State’s Living Lab assets for sustainability.**

**Strategy 4.4.1:** Begin to develop institutional capacity to utilize an Integrative Design Approach to the use of physical assets for experiential learning in sustainability.

**Strategy 4.4.2:** Prepare a strategic plan for the Sustainability Experience Center, utilizing the above, as an example of the utility of the Integrative Design Approach in the use of physical assets in the educational endeavor.

**Objective 4.5: Develop and implement a financial plan that combines internal and external resources to create a firm foundation on which SI can do its work.**

**Strategy 4.5.1:** Develop and implement a strategy for external funding.

**Strategy 4.5.2:** Generate new sources of internal funding from both cost savings and revenue generation for SI activities.

**Strategy 4.5.3:** Prepare a five-year business plan, and secure a long-term commitment for core institutional funding.

**Objective 4.6: Utilize our limited resources strategically through the use of a clear decision-making framework.**

**Strategy 4.6.1:** Apply the following three criteria to the selection and prioritization of our work:

- **Capability** - To what extent is the project aligned with our core competencies? Are we uniquely capable of doing it and can we do it well?
- **Goals** - To what extent is it aligned with our mission and goals?
- **Significance** - To what extent is it aligned with our commitment to high leverage, long-term impact?