What Is Sustainability?
In business, sustainability often refers to reducing the negative impact of an organization’s operations on the environment, society, and/or economy. It starts with the understanding that these three components are interconnected and often overlap.

There are real financial benefits associated with sustainability efforts. They are generally attained through cost savings (e.g. energy reduction, improved manufacturing processes) or increased sales as a result of being more in line with customer requirements and consumer expectations.

Why Sustainability?
Manufacturing and commerce can generate excessive waste which can harm the environment. Increasingly, improving manufacturing processes, respecting and motivating employees, and minimizing environmental footprints are considered standard business practices. Today’s consumers expect businesses to implement policies and practices across business sectors and geographic boundaries that will preserve the environment for generations to come.

Indicators include but are not limited to:
- Waste generation
- Waste minimization
- Hazardous waste management
- Cleaning products
- Energy consumption
- Clean and renewable energy
• Recycling and re-use
• Paper storage
• Electronic storage
• Water use
• Wastewater management
• Community partnerships
• Community service activities
• Manufacturing processes
• Corporate responsibility and sustainability program/policies
• Training and education
• Health and safety in the workplace
• Employee benefits
• Labor standards
• Communication
• Stakeholder engagement
• Indoor air quality
• Outdoor air quality
• Greenhouse gas emissions
• Building design and construction
• Building operations
• Organic, certified resources
• Shipping and transportation
• Transparency
• Life cycle analysis

Tracking

The tracking of indicators demonstrates progress towards goals. No different than a vendor scorecard or corrective action plan (CAP), indicator tracking is a critical element of a sustainability program. A basic indicator tracking checklist might look something like this:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Sustainability Indicator</th>
<th>Sustainability Sub-Indicator</th>
<th>Priority</th>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Timeframe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Main category</td>
<td>Description of the actionable sustainability indicator</td>
<td>Priority ranking assigned by organization</td>
<td>Targeted/desired result</td>
<td>Timeframe for managing the indicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e.g., water</td>
<td>e.g., wastewater management</td>
<td>e.g., high - medium - low</td>
<td>e.g., reduce hazardous runoff by 25%</td>
<td>e.g., short-term/long-term/ongoing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reporting

Increasingly, consumers, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and other consumer groups are pressuring some organizations to offer greater transparency into their supply chains. Environmental, social, and product safety regulations, along with other factors, including consumer and employee trust, customer loyalty, community support and enhanced credibility, are driving some organizations to develop and release sustainability reports.

A sustainability report is how an organization publicly communicates the economic, environmental, and social impact in its everyday operations. The report becomes the primary means of communicating the organization’s responsible sourcing performance and overall impact of the program on the business and stakeholders.

Sustainability reporting provides value by enhancing reputation, meeting expectations of employees, improving access to capital, increasing efficiency, and reducing waste.

Online Resources:


PPAI Business Partner: ppai.org/members/affinity-partners/#8e9d94d-cb76-488a-9919-c94f8345d123

EPA Sustainability: https://www.epa.gov/sustainability

United Nations Global Compact: www.unglobalcompact.org/


Global Reporting Initiative (GRI): www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx

Corporate Social Responsibility Newswire: www.csrwire.com/reports

Nike Sustainability: http://about.nike.com/pages/sustainable-innovation
