

Environmental impact in third sector organisations – December 2019

Environmental considerations are becoming increasingly important for all organisations to address in their work. For the third sector, this can pose a particular challenge where resources are limited or where “the environment” doesn’t directly tie in with an organisation’s mission.

The environment, however, isn’t separate from society, and whether it’s global issues like climate change or local issues like air quality and litter, environmental action can have social benefits too.

TSL members have told us that you need access to simple to use, step by step guides that can help you to work through ways in which you can make a difference around climate change and wider issues of sustainability.

This guide outlines some simple steps that third sector organisations can take to identify and address their environmental impact in a manageable way, whilst still delivering on their core mission. It is the first in a series of briefing papers where we try and demystify some of the key issues around delivering climate action.

This guide is particularly aimed at small-medium sized organisations, but is relevant for organisations working at all scales. It looks at broad environmental impact, which includes but isn’t limited to just carbon emissions.

Step 1: work out where your biggest impacts are

This will vary depending on your size and activities, but key impacts may include:

- Energy use (electricity and heating)
- Travel for business
- Waste and recycling
- Water use
- Staff commuting
- What you buy (eg. stationary, food, IT)

Step 2: measure your current impact

Once you’ve decided which impacts you want to address, you should spend some time measuring your current performance to get a baseline. Some suggested measures include:

Impact	Possible measure	Possible source of information
Electricity and gas	kWh used per year	Energy bills
Business travel	Miles driven or litres of fuel bought	Expenses records
Water use	Cubic metres of water used	Water bill (if metered)
Waste and recycling	Kg materials sent to landfill	Waste contract
Staff commuting	Number of staff taking public transport	Staff survey
What you buy	Volume of resources bought	Procurement records

What about our carbon footprint?

Carbon footprint is one way to understand your impact in the context of addressing climate change.

For a basic operational carbon footprint, you would measure your energy use and fuel for company

cars. It is also possible to do a more in-depth footprint to account for a broader range of impacts including factors such as waste and what you buy.

The Carbon Trust has a tool for small and medium sized organisations to calculate their basic carbon footprint: <https://www.carbontrust.com/resources/tools/carbon-footprint-calculator/>

Step 3: take action to reduce the impacts you can, and keep measuring!

Once you know your current impact, it's time to take action to address it. For each impact, set a target and some initial actions that will help you reach it.

Some action could be fairly easy – for example, pledging to print less for meetings. Others, such as addressing transport, might not be entirely in your control. The key is to prioritize the impacts you feel you can address and set a clear goal.

Some example targets could be:

- Reduce electricity use by x% by 2025
- Go paperless for by the end of 2020
- Reduce car miles for business travel

Actions you can take could include:

- Appoint staff “environment champions”
- Switch to a renewable energy provider
- Encourage car-sharing to work events

Keep on measuring to see the change you create to see your progress. For carbon footprinting and other measures of resource use, you may want to do this annually in line with your financial or operational year.

Step 4: communicate your work and celebrate your success

Sharing your aims and actions is a great way to show your commitment to sustainability and get buy-in from staff and other stakeholders. There is no one way to do this, but some key things to consider include:

- Do your main stakeholders know your aims and support your environmental goals?
- How will people find out what action you're taking and what progress you're making?
- Where and when are you reporting on your targets, and to whom?

Celebrating success, and being open about any challenges you face, is also a crucial part of the process. It keeps staff motivated, and allows the sector as a whole to learn and improve.

Do we need an environmental policy?

To help consolidate and communicate your work on environmental impact, your organisation may decide to create a formal environmental policy.

Generally the policy will be no more than 1 page and outlines:

- What your main environmental impacts are
- How you aim to address and improve them
- The commitments you have to monitoring and reporting these impacts

Examples from the third sector include:

- **Voluntary Action Harrow:** <http://www.voluntaryactionharrow.org.uk/sample-environmental-policy-charities/?LMCL=Rq3YIZ>
- **NCVO:** <https://www.ncvo.org.uk/2-content/927-ncvo-environmental-policy>
- **Prince's Trust:** <https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/environmental-policy>

Helpful resources

Environmental action

- **NCVO Knowhow pages:**
 - How to create a green action plan: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-create-a-green-action-plan>
 - Going green in your office: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-go-green-in-your-office-a-sustainable-design-for-nonprofit-organizations>
 - More ideas for a green office: <https://knowhow.ncvo.org.uk/how-to/how-to-create-a-more-environmentally-sustainable-nonprofit-workplace>
- **Business in the Community's sustainability pages:** <https://www.bitc.org.uk/environment/> - guides and blogs from businesses who are working on their own environmental impact
- **NUS' Green Impact scheme:** <http://greenimpact.nus.org.uk/> - Green Impact is a programme designed to support environmentally and socially sustainable practice within organisations. You can sign up and work with them to measure your impacts and implement ways to address them, coming out with a Green Impact accreditation.

Carbon footprinting

- **The Carbon Trust:** <https://www.carbontrust.com/> - lots of advice, tools and services to help address your carbon footprint
- **UK Government "emission conversion factors"** <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/government-conversion-factors-for-company-reporting> - this is a tool for more in depth carbon footprint calculation used for reporting to government, include step by step guidance for use.

Relevant organisations

- **Fit For the Future Network:** <https://fftf.org.uk/home> - a network for environmental sustainability in the third sector
- **Institute of Environmental Management and Assessment (IEMA):** <https://www.iema.net/> - a global network of sustainability professionals, working to help organisations become more sustainable
- **Students Organizing for Sustainability (SOS-UK):** <https://sustainability.nus.org.uk/> - sustainability programme focused on students' unions and universities, and with good record of engaging the social third sector

Feedback to us

If you find this guide helpful, and particularly if you start to put into practice any of the steps it suggests we'd love to hear from you.

We'd also love to hear from you if you come across issues around climate action that you don't know how to tackle (or for that matter if you do have some solutions). We'll try to learn from others and share thoughts with the third sector in Leeds through more briefings like this.

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