

ICLEI's 10 Keys to Sustainability Planning Success

The following guidance has been excerpted and distilled from ICLEI's 56-page Sustainability Planning Toolkit, which is available exclusively to ICLEI local government members at www.icleiusa.org/sustainabilitytoolkit.

ICLEI's Five Milestones for Sustainability represent the fundamental steps local governments should follow on their sustainability journeys. Below are some of the keys to success for completing each milestone.

Pre-Milestone Planning: Making a Commitment, Forming a Team

Key #1: Hire a sustainability coordinator to run the show.

Many hands will touch a sustainability plan and many voices weigh in, but one person must be the quarterback, and in countless cities that's a sustainability coordinator. To coordinate the planning process for [Baltimore's sustainability plan](#), for example, Mayor Sheila Dixon created an Office of Sustainability within the Department of City Planning. The City designated one project manager to coordinate the planning process full-time and added a part-time manager as well.

Key #2: Obtain buy-in from a big wig.

Buy-in from an elected official is essential. The chief elected official will play a critical role in communicating key messages to the public and ensuring the commitment and participation of government departments. In New York, Mayor Michael Bloomberg's strong and visible commitment drove the creation of [PlaNYC](#).

Key #3: Form teams that build bridges across city departments—and beyond city hall.

Bringing together the right people is an essential first step in the planning process. Developing a sustainability plan requires participation and commitment from a variety of governmental departments, which should be represented on an interdepartmental team.

To shape its plan, a local government also needs to draw on a diversity of outside experts and community leaders knowledgeable in a range of fields. For example, City of New York formed a 17-member sustainability advisory board comprised of elected officials,



business leaders, environmental and community advocates, labor leaders, planners, and real estate developers.

Milestone One: Conduct a sustainability assessment

Key #4: Develop a greenhouse gas emissions inventory.

To conduct a sustainability assessment, a local government needs to research and assess a range of environmental, economic, and social equity challenges within the jurisdiction, such as housing costs, air quality, and infrastructure capacity. But of the most important assessments is the greenhouse gas emissions inventory for government operations, as well as the entire community. Local governments are on the front lines of climate change, and a sustainability plan can drive a city or county's actions to mitigate climate change through myriad actions to reduce emissions and energy use, and to adapt to the unavoidable impacts of climate change. The first step, however, is to obtain accurate data on the overall GHG emissions and their individual sources, such as buildings and transportation.

Milestone Two: Establish sustainability goals

Key #5: Define clear, relevant, and measurable goals.

A hallmark of a successful sustainability plan is high-level targets that can be measured. During the creation of [PlaNYC](#), New York Mayor Bloomberg's emphasis on the maxim, "you can't manage what you can't measure," led to the creation of 10 overarching goals that could be tracked and quantified—and could also inspire. Two of the goals: "Open 90 percent of our waterways for recreation by reducing water pollution and preserving our natural areas"; "Ensure that all New Yorkers live within a 10-minute walk of a park."

Other examples of well-crafted goals:

From Franklin, TN's [Sustainable Community Action Plan](#): Replace 5 percent of the vehicles registered in the City of Franklin with vehicles that use alternative energy sources by 2012.

From [Denver Greenprint](#): Reduce Denver per capita greenhouse gas emissions by 10% below 1990 levels by 2011.

Key #6: Get regular people to tell you what sustainability goals are important to them.

Two of the central principles of sustainability planning are transparency and inclusiveness. Local governments should therefore include the public throughout the planning process. Via small meetings with stakeholders, larger visioning events, or website surveys, it's important to engage stakeholders and community members on what sustainability initiatives are important to them.

For example, Newark's Green Future Summit in 2007 was attended by local and national experts to facilitate a process to enable the people of Newark to define what sustainability



means to Newark and the overarching goals for making Newark a more sustainable place to live and work. The City of Newark intends to use a [report from the summit](#) as a starting point for the development of its sustainability plan.

Milestone Three: Develop a local sustainability plan

Key #7: Develop implementation plans within your plan.

Once you've brainstormed and decided on the individual strategies or measures to achieve your major goals, you'll need to develop implementation plans for each one. These mini-plans can include the implementation timeline, responsible department/organization, key milestones for each measure, and available funding.

PlaNYC, for example, contains 127 initiatives aimed at achieving the City's 10 sustainability goals. PlaNYC contains a matrix of initiatives and goals and the implementation plan matrix that are used day-to-day to manage and coordinate the plan.

Key #8: Take a deep breath and release a draft plan for public comment.

It is essential to solicit community feedback so that the final product is a plan that people understand and support. In Baltimore, community members had six months to provide feedback on its sustainability plan via Baltimore's online public consultation portal and through public meetings.

Milestone Four: Implement policies and measures

Key #9: Obsessively track the implementation status of your measures.

Plans that succeed, versus plans that sit on a shelf, are ones that include indicators, data sources, and baseline data to continually track progress. For example, the [Minneapolis GreenPrint](#) includes 25 sustainability indicators (healthy infants, renewable energy, affordable housing, etc.). A coordinator was assigned to each indicator, whose job was to implement the measures and strategies, coordinate activities across departments, and track progress.

Milestone Five: Evaluate progress and report results

Key #10: Remain accountable to the public.

Each year, City of New York releases a [PlaNYC Progress Report](#) to the public with detailed updates on progress toward the 10 sustainability goals. One year after PlaNYC's release in April 2007, the City could report that it had launched 93 percent of the 127 initiatives in the plan; two years after the release, the City reported that all of the initiatives have been launched, 35 had been completed, and 50 were on time.