SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS GUIDE
Building Connections, Prosperity and Community
Sarasota County gratefully acknowledges research and content developed by the communities listed below in creating similar documents:

Alachua County, Fla.: Creating Sustainable Workplaces and Organizations
City of Flagstaff, Ariz.: Sustainable Business Guide
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SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS OPPORTUNITIES

Sustainability is about more than the environment. Incorporating sustainability principles into your business can strengthen your company's bottom line, improve workplace culture and attract customers. Sustainability is not a short-term trend. It has taken root in both multinational and local business practices and is redefining profit, return on investment, capital and corporate responsibility. Visionary companies, big and small, are shifting toward business practices that respect people, profit and planet to remain not just competitive, but secure in their respected markets.

Investing in sustainable practices can create long-term benefits to businesses such as:

- Reduced operating costs
- Increased competitiveness
- Improved productivity
- New customers
- Greater innovation
- Reduced liability

Sustainable business practices are more than a political or ethical choice. They make good business sense and are necessary for the viability of an organization, community and country. Many of the changes we make are beneficial to our health and environment while also saving money. Reducing energy and water consumption and waste production translates into less resource utilization and therefore, lower operating costs. Buying from local businesses keeps more money in our local economy, reduces transportation emissions and builds connections among neighbors. Every action, no matter how small, can contribute to the global effort while also strengthening our local community.
HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

The goal of this guide is to provide tangible first steps, inspire you to take action, and challenge your assumptions about what might be involved in creating a more sustainable business. While it is written primarily for a business audience, most of the suggestions are applicable to non-profit organizations, professional associations and government agencies.

The guide is broken into categories to provide actionable steps and provides concrete examples of what businesses in our community and Sarasota County government have done in each area to make a difference. This is only an introduction to the opportunities, however. If you would like to learn more and be recognized for your effort, the Sarasota County Green Business Partnership (www.scgov.net/greenbusiness) provides free technical assistance and certification. Similar programs and networks are listed in the Resources section.

SUSTAINABILITY AREAS OF FOCUS

**ENERGY:** Use energy efficiently and seek renewable energy.

**WATER:** Conserve and prevent pollution of our water resources.

**TRANSPORTATION:** Encourage smart transportation.

**WASTE:** Reduce, reuse and recycle.

**PURCHASING:** Set standards for local and sustainable procurement.

**HEALTH:** Encourage a healthy lifestyle.

**COMMUNICATION:** Inform employees and the community about your actions.

**ENGAGEMENT:** Facilitate collaboration and support community service.
Energy conservation and efficiency offer the largest, most cost-effective opportunity for businesses to reduce the financial, health, and environmental impacts associated with burning fossil fuels. Buildings consume about 40% of the world’s energy. Heating, cooling and lighting account for the majority of energy use in commercial buildings. To get the most immediate savings and shortest payback times, look first for no-cost (behavioral) and low-cost solutions. Then focus on upgrades to facility equipment that will require an investment. Consider renewable energy once you have maximized efficiency opportunities.
FACILITY
- Contact Florida Power and Light for a free energy assessment. They will provide information on energy usage and recommendations on best practices and rebates.
- Keep all equipment, such as air filters, clean, and regularly schedule maintenance for system efficiency.
- Use or replace old equipment with energy-saving ENERGY STAR products.
- Install energy management systems that automatically turn off idle equipment.

LIGHTING
- Use daylight for interior lighting when possible, and then compact fluorescent light bulbs or light-emitting diodes (LED bulbs). Use T-6 or T-8 fluorescent lighting rather than T-12. This will reduce maintenance costs as well.
- Install lighting controls such as occupancy sensors, photocells or timers.

HEATING AND COOLING
- Use automatically controlled thermostats for your HVAC system.
- Apply window film to sun-exposed windows, or shade them with awnings, sunscreens, shade trees or shrubbery.
- Weather strip windows and seal your ducts. Maximize insulation.
- Use ceiling fans for air circulation.

EQUIPMENT
- Optimize energy settings on computers, monitors and other electronics.
- Unplug devices that are not in use, and use smart power strips to reduce standby power.
- Reduce the amount of equipment in use. Choose a multi-function copier/fax/scanner to reduce lease and maintenance costs as well as energy use.

Aküwa Solutions Group has completed two server visualization projects that have reduced the number of physical servers from 14 to four. This results in a significant savings, because servers operating 24/7 consume huge amounts of energy and require additional power to cool.

Both the Venice YMCA and the Venice Golf and Country Club use geothermal energy to heat their swimming pools and spas.

Sarasota Memorial Hospital Sarasota Memorial Hospital has installed 42 solar hot water panels to supplement the water heating system in its Waldemere tower. It also became the first hospital in southwest Florida to have an ENERGY STAR-certified building resulting from its extensive energy efficiency updates in 2012.

The headquarters of Blue Sky Solar Group is a zero energy building, meaning there is zero net energy consumption and zero carbon emissions annually.
WATER

Businesses are a significant consumer of water. Commercial water use accounts for more than 15% of Sarasota County Utilities’ water service. A study of commercial building use found that office buildings use an average of 1,200 gallons per day, and hotels use an average of 7,000 gallons per day, representing significant savings opportunities through retrofits and behavior modifications. In addition to reducing the quantity of water used, businesses can also help improve the quality of our local waterways by helping manage stormwater runoff and reducing pollution.
HOW YOU CAN HELP SAVE WATER

• Identify and repair leaks. Millions of gallons of water are lost every year through leaking pipes, plumbing fixtures and irrigation systems.

• Install EPA WaterSense-labeled water saving sink fixtures or faucet aerators. Consider automatic sensors where applicable.

• Consider purchasing low-flow or dual flush toilets.

• Consider using grey water, reclaimed water or harvested rainwater for landscape irrigation.

• Use native Florida, drought-resistant plants in your landscape.

• Direct gutter downspouts and water runoff to landscaped areas.

• Use pavers, gravel or other porous surfaces on walkways, patios, parking lots and driveways.

EPA's WaterSense program has information on water saving products, best practices and tools to track savings. www.epa.gov/watersense/commercial

Sarasota County has implemented numerous water saving strategies in its facilities. In the County Administration Building, more than 60 toilets were changed to low-flow, cutting the water use nearly in half, and 18 urinals were changed to low-flow, going from 1.5 gallons to 0.125 gallons per flush. In addition, over 70 faucets were changed from 1.5 gallon per minute to 0.5 gallon per minute metered faucets. Ten shower heads were changed to ultra-low-flow. Use of reclaimed water and second party metering on the chillers at various facilities have dramatically decreased water rates and reduced the burden on potable water supplies.

GREEN BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT...

Sarasota Memorial Hospital saves nearly 100,000 gallons of water annually by using reclaimed water from air conditioning units in their newly designed energy plant.

Venice Golf and Country Club has reduced the amount of nitrogen and other contaminants released into the Myakka River watershed by more than 4,000 pounds per year by irrigating the property with captured stormwater. The resort has removed thousands of Brazilian pepper and other invasive trees and plants and replanted 13 wetland preserves with native plants.

The Girl Scouts of Gulfcoast Florida building is a LEED certified building, featuring low-flow toilets and faucets and Florida-native, drought-resistant plants. It also preserved the site’s natural wetland and uses it as a teaching opportunity for the scouts.

Through education and improved processes, Doctors Hospital’s Linen Conservation Initiative reduces energy and water consumption and has already saved more than $56,000 in operating costs.
TRANSPORTATION

With the increase in fuel prices, the cost of transportation has become of critical concern to both business owners and their employees. Carpooling or taking the bus instead of making single-person car trips decreases emissions and reduces commuting costs. It also creates a healthier community. Business fleets can also achieve significant savings.
GETTING TO WORK

• Promote walking, biking and public transit. Target wellness incentives to encourage walking or biking and be sure your facility has a secure bike rack. Employers can offer payroll deductions for pre-tax savings through the federal Commuter Choice Program.

• Offer electric vehicle charging stations for customers and employees.

• Provide incentives for carpooling, such as priority parking spaces.

TELECOMMUTING

• Offer employees telecommuting and/or flexible scheduling options.

• Consider alternatives to on-site meetings, such as audio, video or web conferencing.

CORPORATE FLEETS

• Encourage employees to plan their work around efficient routes and to carpool to meetings.

• Maintain your fleet to prevent leaks and optimize miles per gallon, including tire pressure and changing oil and filters.

• When time to replace company vehicles, choose the most fuel-efficient vehicle that meets your needs.

• “Right-size” vehicles for the jobs they need to perform.

Sarasota County maximizes its fuel efficiency through employee education and using the most efficient vehicle for each purpose. The county fleet includes fuel-efficient hybrid cars, buses and even bucket trucks. It also includes solar-powered golf carts, propane-powered forklifts and plug-in hybrid electric vehicles. To help employees reduce their transportation impact, the county provides employees with free access to SCAT transit service, priority carpool parking and other commuter support.

The U.S. Department of Energy’s www.FuelEconomy.gov and Alternative Fuels Data Center www.afdc.energy.gov allow you to compare the fuel economy and operating costs of various vehicles and provide information on new technologies.

GREEN BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT...

Kinetico Quality Water Systems purchased a GPS tracking program to efficiently track progress of daily work on its trucks and to dispatch the proper technician without wasteful gas spending. The company has also integrated more fuel-efficient vehicles into their fleet.

Local Coffee and Tea rewards employees who ride their bikes to work with gift certificates.
The first step to waste prevention is reducing what you consume to the minimum necessary. The second step is identifying ways to reuse consumables for as long as possible. The third step is recycling consumables that you or other entities cannot reuse. When you get smart about how you manage your waste, you save by purchasing less and reducing disposal expenses. The environment benefits through reduced waste in the landfill and lower demand for new products and the raw materials and energy needed to produce them.
REDUCE

- Use email and scanning instead of letters or faxes. Use projectors instead of handouts at meetings. Provide hard copies only on request and ask the same of your suppliers.
- Print double-sided with smaller fonts and wider margins.
- Design marketing materials that require no envelope (e.g. postcards, tri-folds).
- Reduce junk mail by removing your address from national mailing lists. Update your mailing lists annually.
- Eliminate duplicate subscriptions to publications and set up a simple library or sharing system for employees.
- Install air hand dryers in restrooms as an alternative to the cost of paper towels.
- Use tap water instead of bottled water.

REUSE

- Use the back of scrap paper for notepads, and shred paper for packing material.
- Re-use file folders, envelopes and packaging materials.
- Equip kitchens with reusable dishes, glasses and cups.
- Donate used furniture, office equipment and other supplies to local charities.
- Offer an incentive to customers who bring their own shopping bag or coffee mug.

RECYCLE

- Provide recycling bins and clearly communicate what may be recycled. Consider smaller desk garbage containers and larger recycling containers.
- Designate a recycling coordinator at each facility to monitor progress, educate employees and suggest improvements.

Sarasota County has one of the highest traditional recycling rates in the state, recycling more than 47% of the waste generated. The amount of garbage generated per person has dropped from 7.2 pounds per day in 2005 to 5.3 pounds per day in 2012. In its own operations, the county empowers employees as Recycling Champions in each of its facilities to monitor implementation. Its recycling contract includes more types of recyclables than are required by ordinance.

GREEN BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT...

BB&T Bank scans client documents instead of photocopying them. Emails are not printed, and new hire employee kits are distributed electronically.

Dave’s Auto uses Safety-Kleen’s closed-loop recycling program for used oil and solvents, and avoided 24 metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions from December 2009 to January 2012. The program refines used motor oil so it may be packaged and reused in vehicles.

Tropical Beach Resorts and The Resort at Longboat Key Club both participate in the Clean the World program, which recycles soap and shampoos from hotels for distribution to people in need around the world.
Purchasing

What we buy has an impact on our community and the world around us. Businesses purchase a large number of goods and services, and choosing more sustainable products can go a long way toward supporting the local economy, preventing pollution and creating healthy workplaces. By considering sustainability in your product specifications for everything from office paper and janitorial products to computers, you can reduce your impact while maintaining comparable cost and performance.
**SUSTAINABLE PURCHASING**

- Choose local suppliers and service providers that are certified Sarasota County Green Business Partners and committed to sustainable operations.
- Seek third-party certifications whenever possible to ensure quality and performance and avoid greenwashing.

Examples of Third Party Certifications:
- ENERGY STAR: Energy-efficient products
- WaterSense: Water-efficient products
- Green Seal: 375 product and service categories
- Electronic Products Environmental Assessment Tool (EPEAT): Computers and other electronic equipment
- EcoLogo: Products and services in 13 categories
- Forest Stewardship Council: Products from responsibly managed forests

- Compare product prices based on lifecycle costs. Estimate energy and water use as well as maintenance costs.
- Set up a reuse-it cabinet in your office for gently used office supplies. Purchase used furniture or electronics.
- Purchase products made of renewable and/or recycled content material. Look for products that the supplier will take back to remanufacture.
- Protect indoor air quality for your employees and customers. Look for non-toxic products and those that do not off-gas (no- to low-volatile organic compound).
- Install carpet squares or other flooring that can be partially repaired rather than fully replaced.
- Request that deliveries come in returnable or reusable containers.

- Purchase refillable pens and refillable toner cartridges.
- Buy in bulk to reduce shipping and packaging waste, and reduce your per item cost.
- Purchase local food and take into account the sustainable practices of the farmers that grow the food. Rotate menu items based on seasonal availability.
- Use biodegradable, compostable or reusable food and drink containers.

**Sarasota County** has included Environmentally Preferable Purchasing in its Procurement Code, encouraging purchasing from local vendors and Green Business Partners, requiring life cycle cost comparisons when possible and encouraging the use of third-party certifications. The county also has a Green Housekeeping Policy in place, which requires the use of healthier, environmentally preferable janitorial cleaning products and services in county facilities.

**GREEN BUSINESS HIGHLIGHT...**

**The Woman’s Exchange** collects used bags, boxes, packing material and hangers for use in its own operations. During a recent remodel, the store installed used shelving units, displays, a check-out counter, racks and cabinets that were purchased from local retail establishments.

**Global Organic Specialty Source** uses compostable palm fiber trays for packing produce for consumers.

**BB&T Bank** has committed to purchasing recycled content products such as copy paper, toilet paper and hand towels.
A sustainable business must also address the health and wellness of its employees. A healthy workplace lowers your bottom line by reducing absenteeism, insurance costs and staff turnover. A healthy workplace also promotes higher employee morale and job satisfaction, which increases productivity and organizational effectiveness.
ENCOURAGE

• Establish a written company policy that encourages employees to participate in a personal health and wellness program.

• Provide tips for maintaining a healthy workplace.

• Support healthy ergonomics at work stations with approved designs and products.

• Challenge employees to participate in lunch time walking groups, use the stairs or bike to work.

• Provide resources that allow employees to balance work and personal commitments.

• Promote healthy eating habits that include growing and buying local, organic foods.

• Encourage employees to get regular wellness checks and monitor key health indicators.

PROVIDE

• Offer a comprehensive medical, dental and prescription coverage benefit program with expanded preventive exams beyond federal mandates. Offer an Employee Assistance Program to assist employees with mental health and other needs.

• Institute policies for tobacco-free campuses and drug-free work places.

• Facilitate exercise with access to walking trails, fitness centers or on-site classes.

• Locate bicycle storage facilities with showers, change rooms and locker facilities.

• Open access to natural light and good indoor air quality.

• Use low VOC building materials and green cleaning products that don’t emit harsh chemicals.

• Offer healthy foods and drinks at meetings and events and in vending machines.

Sarasota County’s employee wellness program offers on-site fitness centers, exercise classes, smoking cessation support, nutritional counseling, stress management, and financial incentives for preventative care and program participation. This improves the lives of employees and saves millions of taxpayer dollars in insurance costs.

Sarasota Memorial Hospital offers employees routine screenings and preventive exams, an on-site employee gym, personalized nutrition and wellness counseling, an Employee Assistance Program and dedicated lactation room. The hospital also has a bicycle coordinator who encourages employees to commute by bicycle; healthy vending machine options and healthy menus at their café; and offers discounts on fitness center membership. An on-site Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner sees employees for minor illnesses and injuries free of charge.

Smell the Bread Café uses green cleaning supplies made of citrus, vinegar, salt or corn that reduce harmful chemical exposure for employees and customers.
COMMUNICATION

In order for sustainability in the workplace to have an impact in the long term, business owners must communicate their efforts. Many office strategies can also be used at home to provide benefits to employees and customers as well. Changing the work environment is the first step toward changing our society’s consumption mentality. Customers respond positively to organizations that value their communities and the planet through sustainable practices. A strong sustainability commitment may attract new business and strengthen customer loyalty.
EMPLOYEE COMMUNICATION

• Set sustainability objectives and policies with social, environmental and economic goals that are quantifiable whenever possible. Attach implementation steps to each of the objectives and monitor progress in a transparent way.

• Post the company policy statement in a visible location.

• Post a bulletin board or internal website with conservation tips to promote corporate responsibility. Include reminders of existing policies and employee responsibilities in company newsletters or email communications.

• Include sustainability practices in performance appraisals, job descriptions, training programs and employee orientations.

CUSTOMER COMMUNICATION

• Include information on your commitments and accomplishments in your marketing materials and online presence. Incorporate your efforts into customer and vendor communications.

• Support your claims with quantifiable results and third-party verification when relevant.

• Submit news about your sustainability efforts to media contacts.

• Develop an annual sustainability report or include sustainability metrics in financial or other reporting you already provide.

Keeping track of your improvements and communicating progress will help you:
• Motivate yourself and your staff
• Track your savings
• Identify additional areas for improvement
• Demonstrate return on investment
• Take advantage of tax incentives
• Differentiate yourself from your competition

Sarasota County communicates its sustainability commitment with its employees in new employee orientation, through a series of “Green Champion” trainings and through regular posting on the employee intranet. County staff share information with the public through a comprehensive sustainability website, an annual report to the County Commission and news releases about program announcements or accomplishments.

The Hyatt Regency of Sarasota is a Green Business Partner and is certified as a Florida Green Lodge, SWFWMD Water Champ and a FDEP/NOAA Clean Marina. The Hyatt has its own Thrive Corporate Responsibility Program that focuses on four main components: environmental sustainability, economic development and investment, education and personal advancement and health and wellness.

Carlson Studio Marketing communicates its commitment to sustainability as an organization and helps its customers achieve a marketplace advantage by being socially responsible. The company’s triple bottom line approach to communications addresses profitability, but also focuses on outcomes that benefit people and the planet. Its green branding strategies help its clients achieve their business objectives through strategic, environmentally-friendly marketing and public relations.
Opportunities for engagement and collaboration in the workplace have become essential for enhancing morale and increasing efficiency. A collaborative work environment elevates stakeholders to the level of decision-maker through direct engagement and active involvement. Teams of employees can find more creative solutions to persistent problems than traditional top-down methods, and they are more committed to successful implementation. A collaborative workplace fosters a healthy atmosphere and employees who take pride in their work. A sustainable business also maintains strong connections with its community through service and neighborhood engagement.
COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS

- Designate an individual or group of individuals responsible for planning your sustainability programs.

- Create “green teams” or sustainability ambassadors to monitor and help implement various aspects of your sustainability program. Empower employees to identify issues and propose solutions.

- Invite all employees to contribute their ideas, suggestions and concerns in developing and maintaining sustainable practices.

- Provide incentives, such as an employee thank-you luncheon, off-site picnic or recreational activity.

- Use competitions or games to challenge employees to think of creative ways to be more sustainable.

- Encourage collaboration between a diverse group of workers to ensure exposure to new ideas and solutions.

- Value diversity in the workplace and commit to non-discrimination policies.

- Support employee community service efforts with recognition and authorized volunteer hours.

- Engage the local community through fundraising, donations, volunteer projects and outreach to individuals and organizations in your neighborhood.

Sarasota County has adopted an organizational structure with deliberately designed opportunities for collaboration between groups of departments. There is a cross-departmental Energy Conservation Team that is responsible for monitoring county energy and water and empowered to propose new projects to achieve established reduction goals. The Sustainability Star Award program recognizes employees who make an environmental, economic and social improvement in the organization.

Tropical Beach Resorts has engaged its guests and staff in making sustainability improvements. As a result, its guests are more conscious about recycling and reusing their towels, and staff are less wasteful with disposable products. The staff also started using reusable water bottles and carrying reusable totes at work as a result of the culture change.

Siesta Key Hardware & Garden sponsored a special event encouraging proper disposal of household chemicals and electronics by residents. The company partnered with Sarasota County Solid Waste to collect aerosol cans, paint, cleaners, propane cylinders, fluorescent bulbs, computers and televisions for proper disposal and recycling (61 residents of Siesta Key participated, and 4,743 pounds of chemicals and electronics were collected).
If you are interested in improving your sustainability and gaining recognition for your efforts, join the Sarasota County Green Business Partnership (GBP). This third-party certification program provides free technical assistance as well as county-wide recognition and marketing support to increase customer awareness of your effort. The GBP is free and open to all businesses in Sarasota County, regardless of type or size. To learn more, visit [www.scgov.net/GreenBusiness](http://www.scgov.net/GreenBusiness), call [941-861-5000](tel:941-861-5000) or email [greenbusiness@scgov.net](mailto:greenbusiness@scgov.net).

**LOCAL GREEN BUSINESS NETWORKS**

The Greater Sarasota Chamber of Commerce has a Green Business Leadership Council that is dedicated to assisting businesses in developing sustainable best practices, promoting sustainable business policies and educating the community on sustainable business initiatives.

The Green Realtors Alliance of Sarasota is dedicated to the preservation of our environment and natural resources as it pertains to real estate.

Sustainability minded professionals from all sectors meet monthly for informal networking meetings at Sarasota Green Drinks.

**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

The U.S. Small Business Administration offers a clearing house of resources for growing more sustainable business practices. Visit [www.sba.gov](http://www.sba.gov) (keyword “Green Business Guide”) for information on a variety of topics, including:

- Green marketing
- Green business case studies
- Green business practices
- Eco-labeling
- Grants and loans

ENERGY STAR for Small Business provides free technical assistance, energy tracking software and building upgrade guides for small businesses to reduce their energy consumption. You can join as a network participant for access to these resources.

The Sarasota County Green Business Partnership lists resources for businesses interested in making improvements in solid waste, energy and water use on its website at [www.scgov.net/GreenBusiness/Pages/ResourceList.aspx](http://www.scgov.net/GreenBusiness/Pages/ResourceList.aspx).