



2021-2025

# ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY FRAMEWORK:

## A GREENER FORWARD





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# FOREWORD

## Dear USC,

With the creation and implementation of this Sustainability Framework before you, I am filled with a powerful sense of joy and excitement for the future of this organization. Despite this document being the first of its kind, the drive for environmental sustainability and climate action is by no means a new movement on this campus. Countless leaders, both student and staff, have driven change in this area long before this document, but it is designed so that anyone will understand how environmental action plays into every aspect of the USC at every level of the organization.

At our very core, we are student led and staff run. For decades, students have called for environmental action from the Western administration, as well as the USC itself. Whether it be formal clubs, or ad hoc groups of students, it is clear that students have taken an active interest in the battle for our planet's survival and understand that we are at a critical crossroads in the endless pursuit of environmental action. Students have made this clear in community protests, council motions, daily conversations and so much more. As a result of this glaring call from the undergraduate students, as well as the acknowledgement from USC senior leadership of the urgency of this global issue, the USC has published this USC Framework to ensure that all that the USC produces and interacts with is done so with sustainability as a critical lens.

Before you continue to read through this document, I wish to thank all of the student leaders who have tirelessly pressed for climate action on Western's campus. These leaders played a critical role in holding the university, our community, our government, and the USC accountable for taking action as soon as possible to work to preserve our planet for all the future leaders who will step foot on our campus. Your relentless vision and understanding for the urgency of this crisis facing our



earth, as well as your willingness to ensure that this issue is never overlooked or ignored is the basis for this Framework and the application of this lens.

Now to the current staff of the USC – throughout my past year with the USC I have already seen an unbelievable willingness from the staff and the organization as a whole to adopt this lens. Staff members from across our organization are already comprehending the urgency of this issue and it has given me unbelievable hope for the USC and its ability to play a critical role in driving sustainability at Western, in London, and beyond. So to you all, I thank you for believing in this vision, as well for the change you will foster long after my time with the USC.

In particular, to Jeff Armour (COO) and Karla Pacheco (Senior Manager, People and Development), I thank you both for all that you have done to support the creation of this document, as well as begin the implementation of this lens in this past year. Early on, you were able to grasp the urgency of this issue and understood how important it is for the USC to play an active role in the solution. I feel immense gratitude for the support you have provided me and the executive team in prioritizing sustainability this past year, and I cannot wait to see how much ground you will be able to cover under the new direction this Framework sets.

To my executive team, I want to extend my appreciation to you all for believing that environmental sustainability is a crucial lens for the USC to hold core to its existence and for tirelessly looking for ways to implement this lens into your respective portfolios. Additionally, for not only driving your areas of focus, but for also pushing me to continue to look for new ways for the organization to progress. You all have been incredible leaders in the realm of sustainability this year, and I am truly excited to see how future executive teams will carry this pursuit forward.

With the implementation of our Sustainability and EDI Frameworks, the USC will institutionally ingrain these lenses into the culture of the USC for years to come. Once these two lenses become second nature for every employee and volunteer



within their daily functions at the USC, we will finally be able to truly fulfill our mission and our vision. And more specifically, will allow us to not only empower students to change the world, but to do our part as well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Reesor', with a stylized, flowing script.

**Matt Reesor**

University Students' Council President 2020-2021



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The USC's Sustainability Framework serves as a core component of our organization's strategic planning process, which includes the following key documents:

- 1. USC Charter:** Sets forth the core mission, vision, and values of the organization
- 2. USC Frameworks:** Identifies the lenses through which every member of the organization should examine the development and execution of their work
  - Environmental Sustainability
  - Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion
- 3. Policy Paper Library:** Presents data-driven principles, concerns, and recommendations on the USC's core advocacy issues
- 4. USC Roadmap:** One-year tactical plan, written by the executive of the day and passed through Summer Council, which outlines their goals for their year in office

Most simply put, a Framework is a lens. This document alongside its sister document, the USC EDI Framework, exist to allow for any individual to enter this organization and to immediately understand what the USC stands for, and how we carry out our mission on a daily basis. These documents do not contain a prescribed plan and specific steps, however, they do provide clear direction on what must be prioritized when carrying out a task for the USC and to ensure that you have these two lenses at the forefront of your mind every day. The execution of this Framework will be led by the USC's senior leadership team – the executive of the day and the senior managers – and must be championed by every member of the organization, all pulling in a common direction. These lenses should lead you to ask questions such as “Could this process produce less waste?” and “Have we ensured as many barriers to entry have been mitigated in a given hiring process?”. Within these questions and creative thinking from individuals all driving towards a common goal, is where the USC will truly set itself apart, and will find itself able to have a tangible impact on Western's campus, in the London community, and beyond.



# DEFINITIONS

**Sustainability:** Used mainly as shorthand for Environmental Sustainability. Which refers to the long term health and preservation of our earth and all its resources

**Carbon Footprint:** The amount of carbon dioxide and other carbon compounds emitted due to the consumption of fossil fuels by a particular person, group, etc.

**USC Charter:** Sets forth the core mission, vision, and values of the organization

**USC Framework:** When capitalized is referring to the official documents that identify the lenses through which every member of the organization should examine the development and execution of their work

**Policy Papers:** Presents data-driven principles, concerns, and recommendations on USC advocacy files (ie. Sexual and Gender Based Violence, Student Financial Aid, Mental Health etc.)

**USC Roadmap:** One-year tactical plan, written by the executive of the day and passed through Summer Council, which outlines their goals for their year in office

**Board of Directors:** Hired members of the USC who safeguard the organization's corporate function and maintain responsibility for matters related to land, labour, law, and organizational risk

**Chief Operating Officer (COO):** The sole employee of the Board of Directors, and the manager of all USC staff





# SUSTAINABILITY *and the USC*

The climate crisis is undoubtedly one of, if not the most, defining issue of our generation's time. We are already seeing the effects of decades of neglect in the increased rate of extreme weather conditions, we are already seeing land eroding and being inundated in the low-lying island nations, and - at the time of writing this - find ourselves 14 months into the most significant global pandemic in recent memory. These events will only continue to increase in frequency, and at the heart of them all will be climate change caused by human activity and our lack of regard for the planet that we call home.

Now, it is likely not necessary to convince you that our environment is in a state of emergency and why it must be treated as such. Some people however, may not understand why this is something that a student association should hold at the core of its being. The climate crisis is an issue that will define human history, and students have shown themselves to be a powerful and dynamic force in demanding climate action. Young people will be the ones living the increasingly adverse effects of climate change through the remainder of our lives, and it is our duty to make changes while we still can.

As a student association on Western's campus we do hold a unique opportunity to influence change broader than just our campus. The USC takes pride in its ability to drive the student voice forward at Western, but given the scale of this issue we must be prepared to go beyond the Western community. The USC is an organization that serves as a benchmark for many other comparable organizations across the country and we are looked to as a model for governance, engagement and advocacy. This is a unique place we hold in the post-secondary sector's landscape and it presents a truly unique opportunity to affect meaningful change in the student association sphere.

Ultimately, we are finding ourselves at a critical juncture in human history, and organizations must decide now which side of history they wish to find themselves



on. The USC has a duty to protect the environment that we operate within in order to ensure that students for decades to come will be able to enjoy the experiences on this campus that we all have. The climate crisis is escalating and the USC must not stand idly by. With this Framework in place, the entire organization will be empowered to drive in a common direction, which in turn can have nation-wide effects.

To this end, this Framework outlines four overarching tactical objectives that should be considered in all that we do. These four objectives can be applied to any output or operation that the USC manages and if combined will drive the level and breadth of change we are striving for. Additionally, the USC wishes to drive ambition and action amongst our partner organizations, which will include Western University in their pursuit - as outlined in the 2021 University

Strategic Plan - to become global leaders in sustainability in the postsecondary education sector. By operating with these four objectives in mind, the USC will be able to maintain consistency in our actions, which will then allow for tangible changes as soon as possible.

### **Tactical Objectives**

1. Acting locally, impacting globally
2. Empowering student creativity and leadership
3. Catalyzing change amongst partner organizations
4. Reflecting internally to drive external action



# OUR GUIDING PILLARS

Sustainability can be broken down in several ways, however for our purposes we will utilize the five core pillars as modelled by the Joslyn institute<sup>1</sup> to demonstrate how our entire organization readily fits within sustainability. These pillars will serve as an optimal baseline for building our path to a better and more environmentally sustainable University Students' Council. These five pillars are:

Social/Cultural. Economical. Environmental (Initiatives).  
Technological. Policy (Advocacy).

Before we can bring about change in process, beliefs and even resource allocation – both financial and human – we need to be intentional about making time and space for deliberate conversations. An example to illustrate this need is provided below:

## **Example:**

The COO hosts a roundtable with key USC stakeholders (eg. SMT, Executive, key employees or student leadership). This would happen in early spring before staff performance appraisals are done (June) but after the budget is approved (March).

This roundtable or retreat is focused solely on environmental issues, projects and brainstorming. This is not the place for advocacy, but instead action within our organization and the areas that the USC directly impacts. The outputs from this discussion would be short term and potentially lead to long term tactical plans which can be executed through staff training, performance appraisals or even communication channels. The COO has financial resources placed under their authority to build out this retreat and also support the actionables from these efforts.

These efforts, as mentioned above, can be categorized through the five pillars.

<sup>1</sup> <https://joslyninstitute.org/resources/the-five-domains-of-sustainability/>



These pillars serve as a base to present what could and should be addressed each year, and collectively account for every service and operation that we provide.

This example illustrates how intertwined our organization is, and how powerful we can be if we all are driving in a common direction. As you read through the following five pillars, you will notice how every aspect of the USC fits within at least one of them, and that every single member of the USC plays a role within these five areas to drive the USC towards its strategic goals. We encourage you to think about how your role *in particular* can play a role within each of these areas and how you *in particular* can utilize this lens in your role to play your part in one of the defining issues of our time.



## Cultural

Strategic planning is about making change and the best way to foster this within an organization is to keep your staff at every level of the organization, informed, focused, excited and incentivised to constantly be considering that change. This starts at the top of the organizational chart and should begin on day one when a new person enters the front doors. This needs to become something more important than even our values - it should be the actual way we do things and this Framework must be reinforced constantly through training and socialization.

This reinforcement can be done formally with staff through policy and/or clear direction with supervisors but it can also be carried out informally through things like imagery, organizational notifications and finally through carefully structured programming and education. A list of specific prompts has been provided below but many more should be developed regularly:

**Onboarding** - transition of beliefs and approaches, documents on current and past efforts within the organization to be read during recruitment, orientation to resources and expectations

**Training** - specific professional development (PD) set aside for staff to pursue supplementary learning, organization wide town halls with expert panels, links in weekly newsletters for people to watch or read more, category in the performance assessment tool (PA) form for expectations and to facilitate dialogue between managers and employees

**Incentives** - a yearly award for the person who goes above and beyond expectations to make a difference

Programming and productions, in particular, is an incredibly important division of the organization that plays a critical role in creating the culture that students see and engage with. Our programming division should look to enhance awareness weeks/speaking events and even review how we execute programming (digital



tickets, marketing plans and less printed materials etc.) in order to ensure that from every side of the student experience we provide, sustainability is a core attribute of the culture students feel.

Ultimately, on a daily basis the USC must evoke an ecosystem where discussion and thoughts of sustainability are commonplace throughout our offices and spaces. Whether these are catalyzed by specific visual queues, or by subtle nudging by the organization's senior leadership team, this culture is what breeds creativity and buy-in amongst staff and is an incredibly powerful force that will drive us towards our desired outcomes.



## Economic

Money serves two main roles; it is to be earned and to be spent. How we do either of those functions, however, can be approached with the environment and our carbon footprint in mind. Not only is money a currency required for any organization to survive, but it can also be a weapon to be used for positive change.

Earning money can be viewed as the currency we receive in exchange for services or products, but in today's world of social awareness and perceived value, we are no longer looking for the cheapest cup of coffee we can find. Instead we make choices with how our personal money is spent which creates new value propositions and competitive advantages. Therefore, we need to start looking at our offerings to the consumer and exploring what is of value, which leads us to the environment. Would a student pay 5 cents more for a coffee that provides a cup that is biodegradable. Or would they go to the effort of saving 25 cents by bringing their own reusable container? We need to have these conversations and explore all the options so we are making decisions through the lens of what's best for the environment.

We also generate revenue from our investments and there are many approaches to this practice, but we encourage our staff, executive and board to consider the best way to make a difference for the environment while generating an acceptable return. These are not either or statements, you can generate returns from sustainable investing and sometimes in the places you'd least expect it. We must be diligent in this pursuit as this synergy is what will drive broad change most.

The USC spends money in many ways, the largest of which is through our services and operations. Therefore, when building our budgets we need to review, line by line, the opportunities and effects on the environment of where we put our students' dollars within these planning documents.

The USC has operated a grants system for several years which provides grants and funding to clubs and student organizations for their events and initiatives. We should focus on ensuring that students are aware of this opportunity and that it



can be applied to initiatives of all varieties, but in particular that it can be used to support new sustainability initiatives. A heightened focus on communicating these opportunities will be a critical piece of building this awareness.

In order to drive value to our students, the USC often looks to make capital renovations and improvements in the assets it owns. Whether it is in the choices we make in selecting our new resources or in improving our existing ones, these are powerful opportunities to improve our carbon footprint and should be treated as such. This also highlights a need to invest in development opportunities for facilities conferences or materials to review regularly for our staff so they are supported in carrying out this direction.

In closing, we need to be deliberate and careful with our financial resources and how we utilize one of our most powerful signalling tools. Just like the person who decides to spend a little more money on the cup of coffee to help protect the planet we should be doing the same with our corporate currency.





## Environmental (Initiatives)

The first two areas of focus are about our Human Resources and our Financial Resources. This pillar focuses on what we intentionally do. Outside of our operations, training and beliefs, this is where we take direct action against climate change and drive the organization towards greater environmental sustainability.

We have discussed a yearly planning session facilitated by the COO. This will create yearly and/or 3-5 years initiatives. But what are the goals we are shooting towards? These goals are the high level visioning pieces that we can rally behind as an organization and strive for. These are the proverbial mission statements we are living daily to try and achieve in our belief that the environment, the earth we inhabit, is the most important resource humans have.

These conversations and goals should be centered around areas such as:

**Waste reduction** - in every department, not just Food and Beverage (where this has been traditionally focused).

**Sourcing of products** - consider the product's carbon footprint, its supply chain and where it came from. Ensure we are relentlessly seeking this information from our suppliers and contractors.

**Energy usage reduction** - from turning lights off to sourcing higher quality equipment when any department is purchasing new or used items.

**Water usage reduction** - this metric plays into both waste reduction and energy use as hydro-electricity and water use can be a significant detriment to an organization's environmental impacts.

The USC will need a comprehensive strategy for decarbonizing our practices. This will come from the direction of many of our core stakeholders/decision makers, but will be a critical resource for the USC to continue its pursuit of minimizing its impact



and encouraging others to do the same. It starts with analysis, education and setting achievable targets, but knowing the dynamic nature of the USC, this is an exciting opportunity for us to improve our practices and do so quickly. The final area of focus is understanding how we can continue to improve in these areas, despite the fact that we are a tenant in the University Community Centre. Understanding where this will present a ceiling to our development is critical and must be considered as our decarbonization and environmental practices continue to increase in ambition and scale.

Although this area of focus is listed third this is likely where the path forward begins. It is critical to look at ourselves in the mirror first, before we begin to ask more and more of the Western administration. If we can show our independent action and our plans to continue, we stand to exert considerable leverage and drive the administration ever forwards towards a more sustainable university.



## Technology

The ever developing digital world can greatly assist us in not only reducing our carbon footprint through technology oriented solutions, but also in communicating best practices and solutions. Numerous experts believe that technological innovations will be leading the charge of emission reductions and decarbonization in the near future. This presents an incredibly exciting opportunity for the USC to ensure that we remain up to date on new technologies, especially ones that are able to be implemented organization wide.

Exploring how we can use digitization or technological improvements to reduce our impact on the environment is a huge opportunity for the USC to quickly cut our emissions and environmental impact. In this pursuit the USC's IT staff can assist each Senior Manager/Executive in creating a plan for each department so we can adjust departmental planning while preparing to adopt new technologies.

In the same way that the environmental tactics or plan needs to be supported by the human and financial resources, this plan needs to be developed and implemented with budget, training and policy supporting it. We must ensure that we are providing our IS staff with adequate resources and support so that they can play the intended role of looking organization wide at new possibilities for us to utilize technological innovations to continue our endless improvements on sustainability.

The USC has already digitized a majority of it's documents to Google Drive, we have a large base of our standard forms online which can be submitted digitally. COVID-19 forced our meeting agendas, minutes and documents to a digital platform, but there is still much more to be done. From our financial records to our menus, there is immense opportunity across the organization to utilize technology and digitization to our advantage and to drive us forward to a more environmentally sustainable future for the USC.



## Policy (Advocacy)

When it comes to Policy and Advocacy, the USC's truly unique governance structure becomes particularly evident. The USC is student led and staff driven, and what this means is that our stances and political directions must be passed and set by our elected student leaders. Whether that is our student executive making day-to-day decisions or our Council making broader organization wide decisions, this structure is core to what the USC is and why we have continued to support students as long as we have.

With that said, this pillar is to be left to our student leaders to develop and live and is not conceived and produced by our staff. From this section of the Framework, our executive teams and councils of the future should look to institute policy on sustainability, understand what it is in particular that our students want us to fight for, and to set direction for our staff to work within. Our staff are more than capable of utilizing initiative to take the sustainability directive and drive forward, but it is imperative that the direction comes from the students first and foremost, as the USC must focus on what students need most. We must be constantly driving to understand what students want out of their USC and to not make assumptions about what we *think* they want.

Policy and Advocacy are going to be critical pieces of the USC's drive towards sustainability, and aside from our own corporate policy which outline the basics of how we operate, the remainder must be led by our executive of the day working alongside our councillors, our USC club executives, and any other interest groups to ensure that we are focussing on the aspects of environmental action that students want most.

This Framework exists to set a high level strategic change for the USC and outlines the importance of this lens moving forward. From here however, we require strong policy and clear stances to be written down and communicated widely. It is up to our



council to indicate how they desire us to move forward from here, and a likely place for that to start will be by creating and passing a new USC Sustainability Policy and ensuring that it comes back in a form stronger than its predecessor. The stances outlined by this sector of the USC will create accountability and also help external stakeholders understand what matters most to us and what it is that we stand for.



# FORWARD

This Framework began with a *Foreword* and it is no coincidence that it is ending with a note on moving Forward. I wanted to provide this final section to speak to the opportunity we find before us in 2021 – the time of writing this document – and emphasize that now is a perfect time to rethink how we approach our Mission, Vision, and Values. In our most recent budget (2021-22) we made a significant investment by allocating \$50,000 towards sustainability initiatives and improvements. This is a true first for the USC, and is designed to signal that the USC must take a deliberate focus on sustainability and has the financial resources to do so.

Another opportunity before us is that Western itself is in the final stages of solidifying its next strategic plan where it has made significant commitments to playing an active role in combating climate change and striving towards global leadership in climate action. Our administrators have committed to Carbon Neutrality by 2050 - in line with the targets outlined in the 2015 Paris Agreement - and have shown themselves to be ready to make significant strides towards a more sustainable Western. Once again, this update in the University landscape should be seen as both an opportunity to work alongside our university partners to drive change, but also as a responsibility to hold ourselves and the administration accountable to our commitments and continued ambition.

This Framework has purposely not prescribed specific actions for the USC in an immediate sense, rather it has been intended as a steering document to allow the respective Senior Leadership Team of each year to drive the details of how and to continue down this path with urgency. The stage has been set, and now it is time to perform.

Moving forward, ambition will be critical in order to foster tangible change. As we enter a new decade, it is evident we stand before unprecedented opportunities to drive climate action forward. If the USC is able to mobilize our entire organization



from volunteer to executive in the pursuit of a common goal, the outcome may be astonishing. 2020-21 tested the USC like none other, but showed that even in the shadow of a global pandemic we are able to come out of it stronger than ever and be ready to continuously drive *forward*.

Whether the USC is empowering students to change the world - or even save it - we play a critical role in our community and in our sector to drive change forward. This opportunity that we hold should serve as immense fuel for you to drive this mission every day, and take immense pride in the direction your organization is driving towards. Ever forward.







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