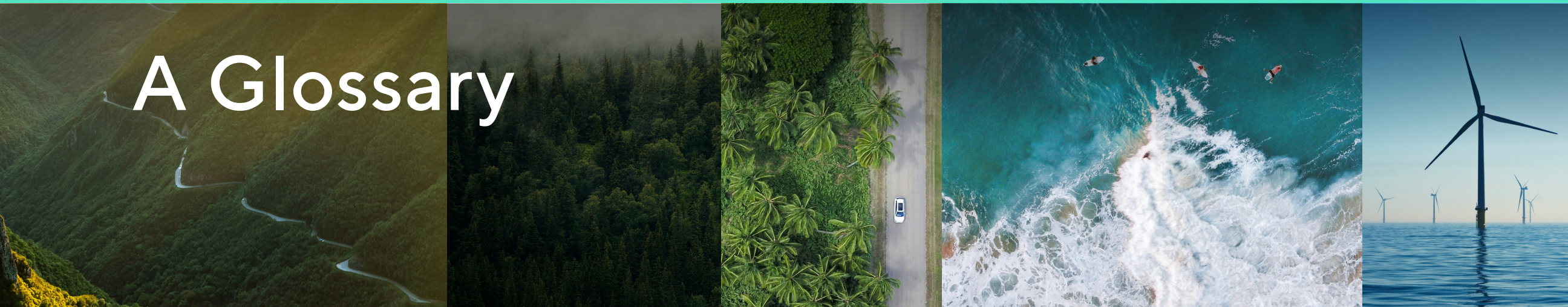




Sustainability Communications Language in a Complex Era

A Glossary





Getting the words right is hard. The language of sustainability is evolving rapidly as companies navigate an increasingly complex and politicized world. How organizations communicate their impact is shifting as they work to avoid greenwashing, without sparking backlash.

The words you choose frame your topic and shape how audiences respond. Clear, consistent terminology builds trust and credibility across stakeholders—from technical experts to employees to customers. The challenge? Communicating across reports, websites, campaigns, and internal channels while balancing technical accuracy, accessible language and political overtones. This glossary helps you navigate these challenges, providing clear definitions and practical communication context for terms that matter most.

How to use this glossary:

Different audiences need tailored messaging to find the on-ramps and common ground to bring more people into the conversation. Use this glossary to align vocabulary across your messaging and organization, building shared understanding that reinforces your strategy and story.

Sustainability language is fraught with clichés that muddy meaning and undermine your goals. Many terms lack widely shared definitions, and some can get you into legal trouble. Other words can shut down engagement.

We've included essential sustainability terms, notes with our insights, and "watch-out" words to avoid denoted using this icon: ⚠️.



Glossary

A

Accessibility

Designing communications materials—websites, PDFs, digital content—to be usable by people with disabilities and diverse abilities. Accessible communications can be read by screen readers, comply with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG), and include features like alt text, proper document structure, and sufficient color contrast. Accessible communication demonstrates organizational commitment to inclusion, expands audience reach, and meets legal requirements.

SOURCE [Web Accessibility Initiative \(WAI\) – Introduction to Web Accessibility](#)

Accessibility isn't just good ethics—it's smart strategy. Screen-reader-friendly reports don't just reach people with disabilities—they're also optimized for AI comprehension. You're serving two critical audiences at once.

Assurance (Third-party)

Independent verification of sustainability disclosures by external auditors or consultants. Third-party assurance gives stakeholders confidence that reported information is accurate, complete, and prepared according to established standards. Assurance ranges from limited to reasonable levels of verification and typically covers environmental data, social metrics, and governance information.

SOURCE [Global Reporting Initiative \(GRI\) – External Assurance](#)

WORDS AT WORK: IOP CASE STUDY

Travel with Purpose
2024 Report

HILTON

The 2024 Travel with Purpose report suite integrates ADA compliance into more than 20 separate documents, each tailored for specific audience needs.

[MORE](#)

B

Biodiversity

The variety of life on Earth, encompassing ecosystems, species, and genetic diversity. In sustainability communications, biodiversity represents both risks and opportunities for businesses, requiring organizations to assess their impacts on natural ecosystems and communicate their conservation efforts. Companies increasingly report on biodiversity through frameworks like the Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures (TNFD) as stakeholders recognize nature loss as a critical business risk alongside climate change.

SOURCE [UN Convention on Biological Diversity](#)

C

Carbon Footprint

The total greenhouse gases produced directly and indirectly by an individual, organization, event, or product, expressed in equivalent tons of carbon dioxide (CO₂e). Organizations measure carbon footprints across Scope 1, 2, and 3 emissions to demonstrate environmental impact and progress toward reduction targets.

SOURCE [EPA – Carbon Footprint](#)

Don't just report your carbon footprint—give context. A number without methodology, boundaries, or year-over-year comparison tells stakeholders nothing about your actual commitment.



Carbon Neutral

Achieving a balance between carbon emissions produced and removed from the atmosphere through reduction efforts and offsetting. Organizations communicate carbon neutrality to demonstrate climate commitment, though credible claims require transparent reporting of reduction strategies, remaining emissions, and offset quality.

SOURCE [Science Based Targets initiative – Net-Zero Standard](#)

Carbon neutral and net zero aren't interchangeable. Net zero emphasizes reduction first, offsetting last. Carbon neutral allows more offsetting. If you're making carbon neutral claims, be specific about your reduction targets, what emissions remain, and how you're offsetting them.

CARBON NEGATIVE



Sounds impressive—removing more carbon than you emit. But the term is often used interchangeably with “carbon positive” and “climate positive” (which mean the same thing but sound contradictory). Without transparent disclosure of reduction vs. removal strategies, “carbon negative” claims can obscure whether you're transforming operations or just purchasing offsets at scale.

Carbon Offset

A reduction in greenhouse gas emissions that compensates for emissions produced elsewhere. Organizations purchase offsets to neutralize their footprint by funding projects that remove or reduce equivalent CO₂.

SOURCE [Gold Standard – What are Carbon Credits?](#)

Offset quality varies wildly. Credible offset communication requires transparency about project type, additionality (would this have happened anyway?), and permanence (will this carbon stay sequestered?). Vague offset claims invite skepticism.

CIRCULAR



Too many people think ‘circular’ just means ‘recyclable.’ It doesn't. Circular economy requires redesigning entire systems to eliminate waste—reuse, repair, refurbishment, not just recycling.

Circular Economy

An economic model that eliminates waste and maximizes resource efficiency by keeping materials in use through reuse, repair, refurbishment, and recycling. Organizations report circularity metrics to demonstrate reduced environmental impact and progress toward waste reduction goals.

SOURCE [Ellen MacArthur Foundation – What is the Circular Economy?](#)

Climate Risk Scenario Analysis

A forward-looking assessment evaluating how different climate-related scenarios could affect an organization's business, strategy, and financial planning. This analysis helps companies understand potential physical and transition risks under various climate futures. Climate scenario analysis is a core component of TCFD recommendations and increasingly required for corporate climate disclosures.

SOURCE [Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures \(TCFD\)](#)

Conservation

Responsible management and protection of natural resources to prevent depletion and degradation while maintaining long-term viability. Organizations report conservation activities to demonstrate environmental stewardship and commitment to maintaining natural capital.

SOURCE [National Geographic – Conservation](#)

Conservation language often bridges political divides more effectively than ‘environmental’ or ‘sustainability’ terminology, resonating particularly well with audiences in rural areas and industries where climate-focused language faces resistance. This broader appeal makes it valuable for communicating environmental stewardship across diverse stakeholder groups.

WORDS AT WORK: IOP CASE STUDY

BRILLIANT EARTH

A friendly, consumer-oriented website report that highlights the circularity and renewable aspects of their business.

[MORE](#)



D

Decarbonization

Reducing or eliminating carbon dioxide emissions from economic activities by transitioning from fossil fuels to renewable energy and implementing efficiency measures. Organizations communicate decarbonization strategies through operational changes, supply chain modifications, and clean technology investments.

SOURCE [International Energy Agency–Net Zero by 2050: A Roadmap for the Global Energy Sector](#)

Decarbonization communications should emphasize actual reductions over offsets. Show what’s changing operationally—energy sources, manufacturing processes, supply chain decisions. Specific reduction targets, timelines, and progress metrics matter more than aspirational statements.

Double Materiality

A reporting approach requiring organizations to assess both how sustainability issues affect their business (financial materiality) and how their business affects society and the environment (impact materiality). Central to the EU’s CSRD, it represents a shift toward more comprehensive sustainability reporting that considers broader impacts on stakeholders and the planet.

SOURCE [Corporate Governance Institute – What is double materiality?](#)



NORWEGIAN CRUISE LINES

A visually dynamic, infographic-rich report visualizes the company’s sustainability measures and impact in a digestible way. Among many custom infographics, NCLH’s 2024 GHG Footprint translates complex emissions data into a clear and compelling visual that represents the sources of NCLH’s Scope 1, 2 and 3 emissions.

[MORE](#)

E

EcoVadis

Global sustainability ratings platform that assesses companies across environment, labor practices, ethics, and sustainable procurement. Widely used in supply chain management to evaluate supplier sustainability performance through standardized scorecards.

SOURCE [EcoVadis - Website](#)

EHS—Environmental Health and Safety

A discipline focused on protecting employees, the public, and the environment from workplace hazards and operational risks. EHS increasingly overlaps with sustainability as organizations recognize connections between operational safety, environmental stewardship, and business resilience. EHS data supports sustainability reporting, with safety metrics integrated into frameworks.

SOURCE [Wikipedia – Environment, health and safety](#)

Embodied Carbon

The greenhouse gas emissions associated with materials and construction processes throughout the entire lifecycle of a building or infrastructure project—extraction, manufacturing, transportation, installation, maintenance, and end-of-life disposal. Unlike operational carbon from energy use, embodied carbon is largely “locked in” during design and construction phases.

SOURCE [Architecture 2030 – Embodied Carbon](#)

Embodied carbon matters because it’s decided upfront. By the time a building opens, you’ve already determined decades of climate impact through material choices. Organizations demonstrating comprehensive climate assessment report both embodied and operational carbon.

Environment

Environment typically refers to the physical surroundings and natural world.

SOURCE [Merriam-Webster Dictionary](#)

The concept of the environment is largely non-partisan, as both major U.S. political parties have historical roots in conservation and acknowledge the need for clean air and water.



ENVIRONMENTAL, ENVIRONMENTALISM



Adding two or three letters changes everything. The distinct partisan connotations don't come from dictionary definitions—they come from how political parties frame the issues differently.

ESG—Environmental, Social and Governance

A framework for evaluating company performance across three dimensions: environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and governance practices. ESG has become the dominant lens for investors, stakeholders, and rating agencies to assess corporate sustainability. Despite political backlash, ESG principles remain central to reporting, with many organizations now using alternative terminology like 'sustainability' or 'responsible business.'

SOURCE CFA Institute – ESG Investing and Analysis

F

Frameworks

Sustainability reporting frameworks provide standardized approaches for measuring and disclosing ESG performance. Developed by international organizations and regulatory bodies, they enable comparability across companies while meeting stakeholder expectations for credible, consistent data.

WORDS AT WORK: IOP CASE STUDY



Restoring Lives

2024 ENVIRONMENTAL, SOCIAL & GOVERNANCE REPORT

INTEGRA LIFESCIENCES

The ESG Report updates stakeholders on progress in the company's sustainability journey and along their established roadmap. It is grounded in a double materiality assessment and aligned with both GRI and SASB reporting frameworks.

[MORE](#)

INSIGHTS

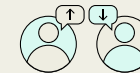
Navigating Anti-ESG When Communicating

ESG terminology faces intense political scrutiny, leaving communicators caught between saying too much and saying nothing. But stakeholder expectations haven't disappeared—consumers still care, investors still evaluate performance, and employees still expect action.

The challenge is navigating this polarized landscape authentically. We have four practical strategies:

Assess

Consider both sides of the debate when planning your communications



Edit

Share what's necessary—not everything



Reflect

Know your core sustainability audience and what matters to them



Discern

Know the difference between a critic and a cynic



Because greenhushing—staying silent about your work—may pose greater long-term risk than getting the messaging right.

[READ THE FULL INSIGHT](#)



FRAMEWORKS QUICK REFERENCE GUIDE



CSRD | Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive

EU legislation requiring large companies and listed SMEs to report detailed sustainability information following European Sustainability Reporting Standards (ESRS), affecting large global companies as well as those in the EU.

[Corporate Sustainability Reporting \(European Commission\)](#)



SASB | Sustainability Accounting Standards Board

Organization that developed industry-specific standards for disclosing financially material sustainability information to investors, now part of IFRS Foundation.

[SASB Standard \(IFRS\)](#)



ESRS | European Sustainability Reporting Standards

Detailed reporting standards mandated under the EU's CSRD, covering environmental, social, and governance topics with specific disclosure requirements for each area.

[European Sustainability Reporting Standards](#)



CDP | (formerly Carbon Disclosure Project)

Global nonprofit running a disclosure system for companies, cities, states, and regions to report environmental impacts, focusing on climate change, water security, and deforestation.

[CDP.net](#)



TCFD | Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures

Framework for organizations to disclose climate-related financial risks and opportunities through governance, strategy, risk management, and metrics. Maintained by the IFRS Foundation.

[Task Force on Climate-related Financial Disclosures \(via IFRS\)](#)



GRI | Global Reporting Initiative

International organization providing the world's most widely used standards for sustainability reporting, enabling organizations to measure and communicate impacts on economy, environment, and society.

[Global Reporting Initiative](#)



TNFD | Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures

Framework for organizations to assess, manage, and disclose nature-related dependencies, impacts, risks, and opportunities, building on TCFD's approach.

[Taskforce on Nature-related Financial Disclosures](#)



ISSB | International Sustainability Standards Board

Organization developing global baseline sustainability disclosure standards focused on investor decision-making, now part of the IFRS Foundation.

[International Sustainability Standards Board](#)



UNSDG | UN Sustainable Development Goals

Seventeen interconnected global goals adopted by all UN Member States in 2015 to address challenges including inequality, climate change, and poverty by 2030.

[United Nations Sustainable Development Goals](#)



Framework Fatigue

The overwhelming burden organizations face trying to comply with multiple, overlapping sustainability reporting frameworks simultaneously. As ESG frameworks proliferate, companies struggle to gather data efficiently, avoid duplication, and communicate coherently across requirements. This fatigue has driven calls for harmonization among reporting standards.

SOURCE World Economic Forum – [Toward Common Metrics and Consistent Reporting of Sustainable Value Creation](#)

Framework fatigue is real, but it's also why strategic communicators earn their keep. When you can translate across GRI, SASB, TCFD, and CSRD without making your team duplicate effort, you're creating actual value.

-----FRIENDLY



Whether it's "earth-," "eco-" or "carbon-," slapping "-friendly" on something doesn't make it sustainable. Specificity matters. Vague claims don't.

FUTURE-PROOF



Nobody knows what lies ahead, so what makes you think you can be unaffected?



GHG Protocol

The most widely used international accounting tool for quantifying greenhouse gas emissions—gases that trap heat in the atmosphere and contribute to climate change, including carbon dioxide, methane, and nitrous oxide. The GHG Protocol provides standards for measuring and reporting carbon footprints across three scopes: direct emissions (Scope 1), electricity-related emissions (Scope 2), and value chain emissions (Scope 3).

SOURCE [GHG Protocol – Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard](#)

Governance

The systems and structures directing organizational decision-making. In ESG contexts, this includes both Corporate Governance (board composition, executive oversight, organizational integrity) and sustainability governance (structures overseeing ESG strategy, performance, and accountability). Both require transparency about authority, risk management, and stakeholder accountability.

SOURCE [OECD-G20/OECD Principles of Corporate Governance](#)

Greenwashing

Making misleading or unsubstantiated claims about environmental benefits to appear more responsible than warranted. Greenwashing involves exaggerating achievements, using vague terminology, or promoting minor initiatives while ignoring larger harmful practices. With increasing regulatory scrutiny, organizations must ensure sustainability communications are accurate, substantiated, and proportionate to avoid reputational and legal risks.

SOURCE [Federal Trade Commission – Green Guides](#)

WORDS AT WORK: IOP CASE STUDY

2024 IMPACT REPORT
Built for Sustainable Growth

STANLEY BLACK & DECKER

Using a suite approach, the Annual Report, Impact Report, and Sales Impact Highlights bring key information to a broad audience, including customers.

[MORE](#)

GREEN



The color of grass, leaves, trees, radioactivity, and aliens. Visual shorthand. But something vague enough to cover everything can't mean anything specific.

Greenhushing

The practice of deliberately underreporting or staying silent about sustainability efforts and achievements to avoid scrutiny, criticism, or accusations of greenwashing. While intended to prevent backlash, greenhushing can limit stakeholder awareness of genuine progress and reduce transparency in sustainability communications. Organizations practicing greenhushing may miss opportunities to demonstrate leadership and engage stakeholders in their sustainability journey.

SOURCE [South Pole – The Rise of Greenhushing](#)



I

Impact Washing

Overstating or misrepresenting the positive social or environmental impact of business activities, products, or investments. Impact washing involves claims about beneficial outcomes that are unsubstantiated, insignificant, or outweighed by negative impacts elsewhere. This misleading communication undermines stakeholder trust and diverts attention from genuine impact initiatives, making transparent measurement and reporting essential for credible communications.

SOURCE Harvard Business School - Impact Washing: What It Is & How to Stop It

Integrated Reporting

Connecting financial and sustainability information in unified reporting that demonstrates how strategy, governance, and performance create value across multiple capitals—financial, environmental, social, and human. Rather than treating sustainability as separate disclosure, integrated reporting shows interdependencies between business operations and ESG factors.

SOURCE IFRS Foundation - Integrated Reporting

While common in Europe and increasingly required under CSRD's connectivity principle, integrated reporting remains rare in U.S. practice where financial and sustainability reports typically stay separate.

J

Just Transition

A framework ensuring the shift toward a sustainable economy is fair and inclusive, leaving no one behind. Just transition principles require organizations to consider social and economic impacts of environmental policies and business changes on workers, communities, and regions dependent on carbon-intensive industries.

SOURCE International Labour Organization - Guidelines for A Just Transition

INSIGHTS

How to Communicate Credibly About Sustainability

Greenwashing accusations can destroy credibility overnight, but greenhushing—staying silent about your sustainability work—may pose even greater long-term risk. Consumers expect environmental action, investors demand ESG transparency, and regulators are watching every word.

The space between greenhushing (saying nothing) and greenwashing (overstating your impact) has narrowed considerably.

Greenwashing regulations are tightening rapidly

State laws now impose daily penalties, and litigation is succeeding more often in court.

Specificity protects you

Support claims with data, establish baselines, and account for your full value chain.

Authenticity beats perfection

Sharing both progress and challenges builds more trust than claims of flawless sustainability performance.

What is it exactly? Want some specific guidance and principles?

[READ THE FULL INSIGHT](#)



L

Life Cycle Assessment (LCA)

A systematic approach evaluating environmental impacts of a product, service, or system throughout its entire life cycle—raw material extraction through production, use, and disposal. LCA helps organizations identify environmental hotspots and communicate comprehensive impact data. This methodology supports credible sustainability claims by providing scientific evidence of environmental performance across impact categories including climate change, resource depletion, and ecosystem effects.

SOURCE General Services Administration – Life Cycle Assessment

M

Mandatory Reporting

Legally required disclosure of sustainability information, enforced by government agencies or regulatory bodies with specific standards, timelines, and penalties for non-compliance. From the EU’s CSRD, to California’s climate disclosure laws, requirements grow even when moderated.

SOURCE European Commission – Corporate Sustainability Reporting

Mandatory reporting sets the floor, not the ceiling. What’s legally required rarely tells your full sustainability story. Smart organizations use mandatory disclosure as the data foundation, then build voluntary reporting and communications that engage stakeholders year-round.

Materiality Assessment

A systematic process identifying and prioritizing sustainability topics most significant to an organization and its stakeholders. Materiality assessments evaluate issues based on their potential impact on business operations and importance to external stakeholders, informing communication priorities and reporting content. (See also Double Materiality)

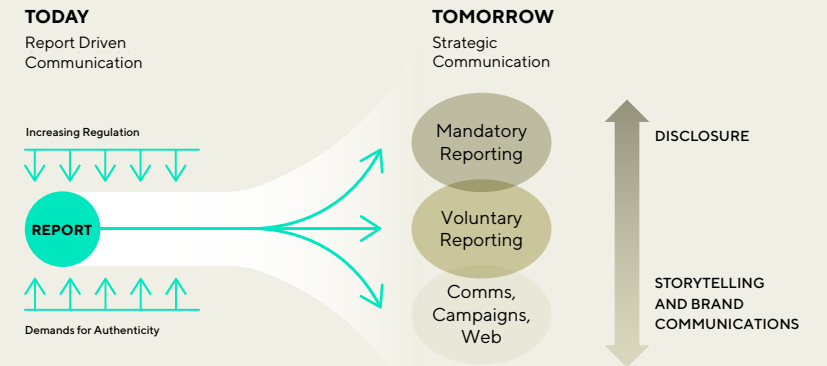
SOURCE GRI – The Materiality Madness: Why Definitions Matter

INSIGHTS

Shifting Landscape of Sustainability Reporting

Companies can no longer rely on a single sustainability report to meet every stakeholder’s needs. The traditional approach—cramming everything into one document—is breaking down under pressure from evolving regulations, diverse audience expectations, and the reality that different stakeholders need different information in different formats.

The emerging three-track model separates and complements rather than competes:



Organizations embracing this approach aren’t just meeting today’s requirements—they’re building communications infrastructure for whatever comes next.

[READ THE FULL INSIGHT](#)



Nature

The natural world and its living systems—encompassing biodiversity, ecosystems, and the resources (land, water, air) that sustain life and economic activity. Organizations depend on and impact nature through operations and supply chains.

SOURCE [UN Environment Programme – What is Nature](#)



Nature Positive

Positive sounds good, aspirational but undefined. While ‘nature positive’ suggests restoring more nature than you harm, it lacks standardized measurement or verification. The term invites confusion and skepticism.

SOURCE [Nature Positive Initiative – What is Nature Positive?](#)

Net Zero

A state where greenhouse gas emissions released into the atmosphere are balanced by an equivalent amount removed or offset, resulting in no net increase in atmospheric greenhouse gases. Net zero commitments require organizations to reduce emissions as much as possible across their value chain before using high-quality carbon removals to neutralize remaining emissions.

SOURCE [Science Based Targets initiative – Net Zero Standard](#)

Net zero isn't just math—it's a hierarchy. Reduction comes first, removal comes last. If your net zero plan relies heavily on offsets rather than operational transformation, stakeholders will notice. Show your reduction roadmap first, then explain what minimal emissions remain.

- NEUTRAL



When added as a modifier (climate neutral, water neutral), the lack of universal definitions and oversaturated use oversimplifies complex sustainability efforts and invites greenwashing accusations.



RECYCLABLE



Calling something “recyclable” doesn’t mean it gets recycled. Without accessible collection systems, processing facilities, and market demand for the material, “recyclable” is theoretical at best. If your local recycling program won’t accept it, it’s misleading to claim recyclability. Same applies to ‘biodegradable’ and ‘compostable’—conditions matter.

REGENERATIVE



Regenerative agriculture has scientific roots, but corporate ‘regenerative’ claims often lack the rigor. Without specific practices disclosed and outcomes measured, it’s buzzword territory.

Report Suite

Multiple coordinated documents that together comprise an organization’s comprehensive sustainability communications, rather than a single annual report. Report suites typically include summary reports, data appendices, topic-specific documents, digital hubs, and stakeholder-specific communications.

SOURCE [Ideas On Purpose – Is One Report the Right Solution for ESG?](#)

Report suites aren’t about creating more work—they’re about working strategically. Different stakeholders need different depths of information.

Resilience

The ability of an organization, system, or community to anticipate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from disruptions while maintaining essential functions and adapting to changing conditions. In sustainability communications, resilience encompasses climate adaptation, supply chain flexibility, social cohesion, and operational continuity planning.

SOURCE [UNDRR – Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction](#)



S

SCIENCE-BASED



Slapping “science-based” on a claim doesn’t make it rigorous. Without third-party validation, specific methodology disclosure, or clear standards, it’s just vague credibility-seeking.

Science-Based Targets

Greenhouse gas emission reduction targets verified and approved by the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi), confirming they align with climate science requirements to limit global temperature increase to 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels. SBTi targets follow specific methodologies and undergo third-party validation.

SOURCE [Science Based Targets initiative – How it Works](#)

Scope 1, 2, and 3

The three categories of greenhouse gas emissions defined by the GHG Protocol for comprehensive carbon accounting. Scope 1: direct emissions from owned or controlled sources. Scope 2: indirect emissions from purchased electricity, heating, and cooling. Scope 3: all other indirect emissions in the value chain, including suppliers, products, and services.

SOURCE [EPA–Scope 1 and Scope 2 Inventory Guidance](#)

WORDS AT WORK: IOP CASE STUDY



Empowering everyday heroes with sustainable solutions

OSHKOSH CORPORATION
2024 SUSTAINABILITY REPORT

OSHKOSH CORPORATION

This robust report helps readers understand the full scope of sustainability work Oshkosh is undertaking, what’s on the horizon, and the significance to their business success. The report includes discussion of recently approved science-based targets and the commitment to align near-term and net-zero targets with the latest climate science.

[MORE](#)

Stakeholder Engagement

Involving individuals, groups, or organizations affected by or interested in an organization’s activities, decisions, or outcomes. Effective stakeholder engagement informs sustainability strategy development and ensures communication addresses stakeholder concerns and expectations.

SOURCE [Accountability – AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard](#)

INSIGHTS

Options for Your Sustainability Digital Hub

All companies need to address sustainability on their website—it’s critical for reputation and stakeholder expectations. But there’s no single right approach. What works better depends on your corporate site’s flexibility, your audience’s needs, and your organizational structure.

Create a dedicated microsite that gives your sustainability team flexibility to control narrative, update frequently, and engage audiences on their terms.



Build a comprehensive section within your primary website that integrates sustainability across all properties and leverages existing traffic.



The choice depends on technical constraints (*can your corporate site accommodate robust content?*), stakeholder priorities (*do raters and investors need a central hub?*), and whether sustainability content risks getting buried in product-focused corporate sites. Sometimes the answer is both—microsite for depth, corporate site for visibility.

[READ THE FULL INSIGHT](#)



Stewardship

Responsible management and care of resources, relationships, or assets entrusted to an organization, focusing on long-term sustainability and benefit for current and future stakeholders. Corporate stewardship encompasses environmental protection, social responsibility, and ethical governance practices that extend beyond legal compliance.

SOURCE [Forbes - Corporate Stewardship](#)

Sustainability

Meeting present needs without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs, encompasses environmental stewardship, social responsibility, and economic viability. Sustainability also refers to business practices that create long-term value while minimizing negative impacts on people and the planet.

SOURCE [UCLA - What is Sustainability?](#)

Despite political headwinds, sustainability remains essential to communicate. The key is demonstrating sustainability as integral to business strategy, not an add-on initiative.

Sustainability Hub

A dedicated digital platform or website section serving as the central repository for an organization’s sustainability information—reports, data, stories, and resources. Hubs enable year-round communication beyond annual reports, providing stakeholders easy access to current information and progress updates. These platforms often integrate various formats (videos, infographics, interactive data) to engage different audiences.

SOURCE [Ideas On Purpose - Options for Your Sustainability Hub](#)



Transition Plan

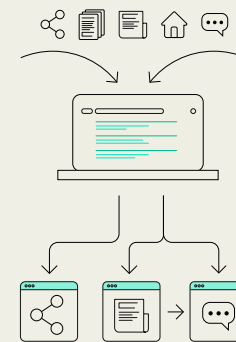
A comprehensive strategy outlining how an organization will evolve its business model, operations, and investments to align with environmental goals, particularly net zero emissions. Transition plans communicate specific actions, timelines, resource allocation, and governance structures for achieving sustainability targets as well as an accountability mechanism.

SOURCE [EPA - Climate Transition Planning](#)

INSIGHTS

AI Search Changes Everything, and What You Can Do About It

TRADITIONAL SEARCH



AI SEARCH



When someone searches for your organization’s sustainability practices, what do they find? AI-powered search synthesizes information from multiple sources into one answer. The critical question: is that answer based on your content, or someone else’s interpretation?

If you don’t provide comprehensive, authoritative content about your sustainability work, AI systems will find other sources—aggregators, critics, outdated articles. Your website is now your primary defense against misinformation in AI-generated results.

Organizations are now optimizing for AI comprehension through authoritative digital hubs, comprehensive content, and clear information architecture, and they’re taking control of AI’s narrative. Those waiting may find their sustainability story already written by others.

[READ THE FULL INSIGHT](#)



Voluntary Reporting

Self-initiated disclosure of sustainability information beyond legal requirements, typically following established frameworks or standards chosen by the organization. Voluntary reporting allows companies to demonstrate leadership, meet stakeholder expectations, and communicate progress toward sustainability goals. Though not legally mandated, voluntary reporting often follows recognized standards like GRI or SASB to ensure credibility and comparability.

SOURCE [European Commission](#)

Mandatory disclosure provides data, voluntary reporting provides context, strategy, and narrative. This is your opportunity to control the narrative before AI and aggregators do it for you.



Web Sustainability Guidelines

Draft standards developed by the World Wide Web Consortium (W3C) for reducing the environmental impact of digital products and services. WSG covers user experience design, web development, hosting infrastructure, and business strategy.

SOURCE [Web Sustainability Guidelines](#)

Many WSG recommendations overlap with best practices for performance, accessibility, and SEO. Improvements that benefit sustainability also enhance user experience and AI discoverability—faster, more accessible sites serve all audiences better. It's rare when doing the right thing also improves business outcomes across the board.



Zero Waste

A design principle and goal encouraging waste elimination by redesigning resource life cycles so all products are reused, with no trash sent to landfills, incinerators, or the environment. Organizations communicate zero waste initiatives as part of circular economy strategies, demonstrating resource efficiency and environmental stewardship.

SOURCE [Zero Waste International Alliance - Zero Waste Definition](#)

Additional Resources

Avoid These Overused and Underwhelming Sustainability Terms

[Trellis](#)

Greenwashing Terms To Avoid at Any Cost

[Trellis](#)

Four Words that Don't Polarize People

[Triple Pundit](#)

Sustainability Glossary: The ABCs of Sustainability Reporting

[Workiva](#)

[MORE INSIGHTS AT IDEAS ON PURPOSE](#)



Strategy-led and creative-driven sustainability & impact communications.

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