

# **5 Top Tips** for Developing a Sustainability Report

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## This spring BDO USA celebrated a milestone — the release of our inaugural Sustainability Report.

Developing the report was a rewarding and informative process, but it was not a simple one. As we reflect on the work we did to produce our first report, we found there were a few key takeaways that will inform not only how we approach future reports but also how we navigate our sustainability journey.

A sustainability report is a means to communicate a larger strategy and report on its progress, helping an organization foster both transparency and accountability. Developing a report offers teams across an organization the opportunity to work together to create a more sustainable organization and reinforce action for positive impact, both for internal and external stakeholders and for the environment.



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### Progress hinges on collaboration.

From data collection and reporting to strategy and goal setting, coordination across your organization is imperative to identifying opportunities, setting and aligning around goals and strategy, and operationalizing new policies and programs.

Nearly every team in an organization has ownership over some part of sustainability. Establish working groups and communication channels to facilitate the combination of expertise, management of data, and ownership of process. Sustainability teams must work closely with operational teams and leaders to determine current sustainability impacts, opportunities for further integration of sustainable policies and practices, and methodologies for effective reporting.

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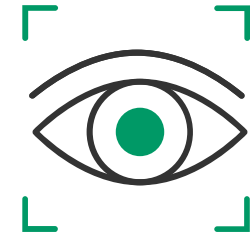


### Data is the secret to success.

Understanding what data will be required is essential for reporting, informing strategy and tracking progress. Determining what data is available, who has oversight of it, and whether it's reliable is half the battle. Complete and verifiable data not only enables thorough and transparent sustainability reporting, but it also positions your sustainability team and operational leaders to identify both risks and opportunities for meaningful change.

Look to external resources like the Greenhouse Gas Protocol, Science Based Targets initiative and Global Reporting Initiative, among others, for best practices. To help ensure accuracy, processes for collecting and organizing data should be thoroughly documented and an audit trail maintained. To help ensure integrity, verify your data. Check final, calculated data against original source data. Verify formulas. Question whether each result makes sense, and if not, take steps to correct any errors or explain any outliers. Finally, retain and organize source documentation, and document the methodology used for future reference.

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### Be transparent.

It's ok to say you're not there yet. Sustainability is a journey, and we all need to start somewhere. Authentic, transparent communication is essential in developing a credible report that helps avoid accusations of greenwashing.

Assess the accuracy of both disclosures and the context in which they'll be communicated. Clarity on what's included — and excluded — results in disclosures that can offer valuable insight and inform decision making.



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### Be mindful about your commitments.

Teams must garner support from senior leadership to be able to effectively drive change and obtain the resources and investments required to make good on commitments and make progress toward goals.

As you evaluate your strategy, begin with the end in mind. Ensure you're setting reasonable, attainable goals that push your organization to improve, while at the same time considering impacts to resources, finances and other priorities. Your sustainability report is one of the best means to communicate your strategic commitments and the progress made against established goals.

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### Give voices — at all levels — opportunities to be heard.

Identifying the issues that matter most to internal stakeholders means all employees must have the opportunity to be part of the conversation. Priorities of senior leaders may differ from those of early-stage employees — and both perspectives matter.

Conducting a materiality assessment on the ESG topics that matter most to all employees fosters organization-wide engagement and gives employees at all levels an opportunity to have a voice. Just as critical is demonstrating that those voices have been heard and that your organization is taking steps to align values and prioritize accordingly. Communicating progress to your employees — not only in your sustainability report but also on an ongoing basis — is essential in achieving an authentic, engaging culture rooted in sustainability.

## Looking Back and Looking Forward

For every organization, sustainability is a journey — one that requires constant measurement, assessment and adjustment. Sustainability reporting is a mechanism through which we can be transparent and hold ourselves accountable, communicating both our progress today and our plans for a better tomorrow.

At BDO, we view sustainability as an investment in the strength of our culture, the resilience of our business and the future of our planet. [Learn more](#) about our corporate sustainability and ESG program. If you need assistance with your own sustainability journey, [contact us](#) to learn more about [BDO's Sustainability and ESG Services and Solutions](#).





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