

PRIORITY ACTION BRIEFS

VISION 2020

A SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY FOR
MCGILL UNIVERSITY



McGill

SUSTAINABILITY
AT MCGILL



RESEARCH

ACTION 1:

DEFINING

SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

Through a consultative process, develop a working definition of “sustainability research” and map the presence of such research at McGill.

DESCRIPTION

Research that explores or pursues a flourishing future for humans and ecosystems often focuses on relationships among the three pillars of sustainability: environment, society, and economy. Yet while many researchers are engaged in sustainability-related work at McGill, and while sustainability is one of the core commitments of McGill’s Strategic Research Plan (2013), the University lacks a clear, agreed-upon definition of exactly what sustainability research is and how it is carried out. Mobilizing the Research Advisory Council to develop an academically rigorous definition of sustainable research is not only an important starting point for more connected efforts here at McGill, but is also needed to keep pace with other universities. In addition, a definition will help McGill to track sustainability research in the future.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- A working group will be convened by the Research Advisory Council;
- A review of peer universities’ definitions of sustainability research will be conducted;
- A definition of sustainability research at McGill will be developed by the working group in consultation with the McGill research community, including centers, schools, and institutes;
- The definition will be endorsed by the Research Advisory Council, chaired by the Vice-Principal Research and International Relations;
- Sustainability will be included in academic tracking systems developed at McGill.

PARTNERS

Office of the Vice-Principal Research and International Relations; Office of the Provost

ACTION 2:

COLLABORATIVE SUSTAINABILITY RESEARCH

Develop a networking platform to facilitate collaborative sustainability research.

DESCRIPTION

The research needed to successfully tackle the complex sustainability challenges of the 21st century is often multi-, inter-, or trans-disciplinary. While there is a precedent for events that gather researchers at McGill, some of which have been around sustainability, there is an opportunity to expand and develop a platform to facilitate collaborative sustainability research in the coming years. A platform that allows researchers to cluster around sustainability challenges or questions, and potentially apply for collaborative research grants, will advance one of the core commitments of McGill's Strategic Research Plan (2013) and align with best practices at peer universities. Here at McGill this platform could include seminars, workshops, seed funding, applied student research, events, and lectures.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- A forum for exchange between sustainability researchers from different disciplines will be provided;
- Opportunities will be explored to establish a seed fund for the development or piloting of joint sustainability research grant applications;
- Opportunities will be provided for applied student research projects or extra-curricular research projects on sustainability;
- Championship and support will be provided for student-led initiatives, such as the McGill Sustainability Research Symposium;
- A series of public lectures and policy panels featuring speakers from within and beyond McGill will be held.

PARTNERS

McGill School of Environment; Marcel Desautels Institute for Integrated Management; Trottier Institute for Sustainability in Engineering and Design; Office of the Vice-Principal Research and International Relations

ACTION 3:

Sustainable Labs

Develop and implement a Sustainable Labs program aiming to foster sustainability in labs.

DESCRIPTION

Sustainability in research includes not only what we research but how we research it. In order to fulfill directives of McGill's Sustainability Policy (2010) – including minimization of resource use, a lifecycle approach to activities, and accessibility – this project will embed sustainability considerations into the already-existing network of groups working to improve lab processes. This network includes the University Lab Safety Committee and its 40 reporting departmental committees, a collaborative effort led by Environmental Health and Safety in partnership with a number of committed professors and several administrative offices. Leveraging active student involvement through the McGill Waste Project and the McGill Energy Project, as well as the work of pilot projects like Green Biobanking, Mercury-Free Microscopy, and the Shut Your Sash fume hood efficiency initiative, the Sustainable Labs program will expand and institutionalize best practices in the field. In the future, the scope will ideally expand from wet labs to all labs.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Best practices research on sustainable labs programs will be completed;
- Initial recommendations for the structure and content of a McGill Sustainable Labs program will be made;
- A group of key stakeholders will meet regularly to develop the program;
- The Sustainable Labs program will be implemented and integrated with McGill's existing system for lab safety and monitoring.

PARTNERS

Environmental Health & Safety; Office of the Vice-Principal Research and International Relations; University Lab Safety Committee; Office for Students with Disabilities; McGill Office of Sustainability; McGill Energy Project; McGill Waste Project



EDUCATION

ACTION 4:

APPLIED STUDENT RESEARCH

Identify and facilitate opportunities for applied student research that advances sustainability.

DESCRIPTION

Applied student research (ASR) has played an important role in measurably improving McGill's sustainability performance in recent years while also providing real-world learning experiences to students. Student-led efforts to coordinate ASR opportunities – including the McGill Food Systems Project, the McGill Energy Project, the McGill Waste Project, and the McGill Spaces Project (the MXPs) - have demonstrated the win-win potential of this kind of research. Scaling up and supporting sustainability-related ASR will build on recent efforts to catalogue and publicize ASR opportunities through a Living Lab database of projects as well as a wiki-style website. This process will also be supported by and in turn catalyze the ongoing work of the emerging multi-stakeholder network on Community-Engaged and Experiential Learning & Research (CEELR Network), which has already investigated ASR models at peer universities. The Office of the Vice-Principal, Research and International Relations will provide guidance on McGill's research expertise to the CEELR Network. Finally, this action will facilitate opportunities to earn points toward the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS).

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- The Living Lab database (of ASR project reports) and Living Lab wiki website (of potential ASR projects, faculty supervisors, and courses) will be populated and communicated;
- Opportunities to increase the number of faculty and staff supervisors for ASR projects will be explored;
- Training and communication support for sustainability ASR groups at McGill will be provided;
- Networking events will be hosted to make ASR more visible and to connect efforts;
- A common brand for ASR activities will be developed and used;
- The establishment of a new course code – cross-listed in every faculty – will be explored, to make ASR opportunities more accessible.

PARTNERS

Student Services; Teaching and Learning Services; Social Equity and Diversity Education Office; McGill Office of Sustainability; Office of the Vice-Principal Research and International Relations; McGill Energy Project; McGill Waste Project

ACTION 5:

FACULTY FELLOWS IN SUSTAINABILITY

Develop a program in which small groups of faculty members are identified each year as Faculty Fellows in Sustainability.

DESCRIPTION

Following the directive of McGill's Sustainability Policy (2010) to "foster inquiry into sustainability through teaching, research and the university experience" this action will serve as a voluntary means to support faculty members who are interested in integrating sustainability into their courses. Through the establishment of a Faculty Fellows in Sustainability program, this action will put in place structures to connect and support small groups of faculty members from the same or related disciplines to work together as they explore how best to do so. Recognizing that the McGill Office of Sustainability and Teaching & Learning Services have already researched models at other universities to this end, the project will continue to take an inquiry-based approach and place a focus on peer learning. As successive cohorts of Faculty Fellows in Sustainability complete their experience, the network of faculty members with this expertise and perspective will strengthen and grow. This action will also help McGill earn points toward the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS).

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Funding to support the development of the Faculty Fellows in Sustainability program will be sought through the Sustainability Projects Fund;
- A working group co-chaired by Teaching & Learning Services and the McGill Office of Sustainability will develop a project plan that includes evaluation and communication strategies;
- The working group will select two groups of faculty members with whom to work as the pilot cohort of the Faculty Fellows in Sustainability;
- The initial cohort(s) will complete and evaluate their experiences as Faculty Fellows in Sustainability and provide recommendations for program development.

PARTNERS

Teaching & Learning Services; McGill Office of Sustainability



CONNECTIVITY

ACTION 6:

CAMPUS HUBS

Renovate underused indoor and outdoor spaces on campus to transform them into community gathering spaces.

DESCRIPTION

A dynamic intellectual community, founded on interdisciplinary collaboration, is the first principle identified in McGill's Master Plan Principles Report (2008). A strong community fabric also plays an important role in supporting a culture of sustainability. In discussing opportunities to foster a culture of sustainability at McGill, community members repeatedly identified a desire for more informal places to relax, connect and explore ideas together. As a response to this, this action aims to foster interaction, creativity, and connection through well-designed physical spaces. Building on the success of projects such as the Edible Campus, which transformed the Burnside Terrace, and the redevelopment of the square in front of the James Administration Building, this action will ensure that landscape design plans are completed for the three main campus entrances (Milton Gates, Roddick Gates, McTavish) as well as the Y-intersection. This action will also bring key stakeholders together around the common goal of improving underutilized indoor and outdoor spaces at McGill. Inspired by "placemaking" trends in urban planning and community revitalization - yet keeping in mind constraints of budget, physical infrastructure, and climate – stakeholders will focus on creative modifications to physical spaces that can be accomplished with modest investments of budget and time. Campus and Space Planning will play a key role in implementing this action, as will the student-led McGill Spaces Project, Student Housing and Hospitality Services, and faculty partners in the Schools of Architecture and Urban Planning.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Landscape design concept studies will be completed for the three main campus entrances (Milton, Roddick, McTavish) and associated campus roads, as well as the Y-intersection;
- The McGill Spaces Project will include representation from a wide variety of key stakeholders, will meet regularly, and will coordinate opportunities for applied student research on topics related to the redesign of campus spaces;
- A prioritized list of underused indoor and outdoor spaces will be developed;
- Funding will be sought from a variety of sources for creative, small-scale, "placemaking" pilot projects based on the prioritized list.
- Reviews of food service locations will be completed with the goal of improving the student experience in and around these locations.

PARTNERS

Campus and Space Planning; Student Housing and Hospitality Services; McGill Spaces Project

ACTION 7:

SUSTAINABLE MCTAVISH

Collaborate with the City of Montreal and other partners to redevelop McTavish Street into a pedestrian-friendly corridor that showcases best practices in sustainable urban planning and serves as a center of community activity.

DESCRIPTION

Guided by its Master Plan Principles Report (2008) and in partnership with the City of Montreal, McGill chose to pedestrianize lower campus, including lower McTavish Street, in 2010. This was followed by attempts to create a more welcoming and connecting environment by adding planters, benches, etc. Currently, the City of Montreal has plans to change the water supply pipes on lower McTavish, and has also identified McTavish Street as one of several promenades urbaines—pedestrian corridors to be rejuvenated in celebration of the 375th anniversary of Montreal. This work, scheduled to be completed by the end of 2015, presents an exciting opportunity to undertake a more ambitious and innovative redevelopment of this area of campus. By working closely with the City of Montreal to ensure that the plan for McTavish Street incorporates McGill's priorities, the University will ensure that the corridor is welcoming to pedestrians, serves as a center for community activity, and incorporates best practices in sustainable urban planning and design.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- McGill representatives will participate in all City of Montreal working groups related to McTavish Street redevelopment;
- McGill will work with the City of Montreal on its plan for the redevelopment of upper and lower McTavish Street, in an effort to ensure that McGill's priorities and the campus context are reflected in the plan.

PARTNERS

Facilities, Operations and Development; Campus and Space Planning;
McGill Office of Sustainability

OPERATIONS

ACTION 8:

GREEN BUILDING

Adopt McGill green building standards that incorporate the LEED credit system and aim to achieve at least LEED Silver for all major construction and renovation projects.

DESCRIPTION

The built space of any campus can directly reflect a university's approach to sustainability. In McGill's Sustainability Policy (2010), a commitment to "meet or exceed in our operations governmental standards of sustainability for educational institutions and the norms of sustainability achieved by our comparator universities" is advanced. Though McGill's historic infrastructure poses challenges for sustainable design and building, one building (Life Sciences Complex, 2012) has already achieved LEED Gold certification, and an informal goal of meeting LEED Silver standards for renovation has been maintained. Recently, representatives from several units within University Services have discussed the formalization of green building standards that will guide all of McGill's future renovation and construction projects. This action will see those standards finalized, adopted, and implemented.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Green building standards that incorporate the LEED credit system and aim to achieve at least LEED Silver for all major construction and renovation projects will be adopted by University Services;
- These standards will be implemented to guide all renovation and construction projects undertaken at McGill and incorporated into contracts with those doing business with the University.

PARTNERS

Office of the Associate Vice-Principal, University Services; Facilities, Operations and Development;
McGill Office of Sustainability

ACTION 9:

SUSTAINABLE PROCUREMENT

Implement the Sustainable Procurement Strategic Action Plan.

DESCRIPTION

McGill recognizes that its demand for materials, goods, and services can generate social, economic and environmental impacts, both locally and abroad. Sound purchasing decisions represent a crucial component of McGill's sustainability performance. To this end, the University's Procurement Policy (2013) states that Procurement Services are expected "[...] to promote and lead the way in establishing a culture of sustainable procurement practices at McGill and in its wider community." Building on this Policy, Procurement Services has developed a five-year Strategic Action Plan which aims at raising awareness, supporting life-cycle thinking and the consideration of triple bottom line principles throughout its purchasing activities. The implementation of this Action Plan will support McGill's transition towards improved resource management, as McGill's 4-R hierarchy (Rethink, Reduce, Reuse, Recycle) will be applied to Procurement activities and decision-making.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Procurement Services Staff and buyers, as well as other administrative members of the University involved with purchasing activities, will be trained to incorporate life-cycle thinking and triple bottom line criteria (social, economic, environmental) into their day-to-day activities;
- Sustainability criteria will be incorporated into calls for tenders;
- A Supplier Code of Conduct will be adopted;
- A regulation and accompanying procedures for managing McGill's used and end of life (U/EoL) IT equipment will be adopted and rolled-out.
- Procurement Services will engage McGill's academic community in supporting sustainable procurement and provide students with the opportunity to conduct applied student research projects.

PARTNERS

Procurement Services

ACTION 10:

WASTE MANAGEMENT

Conduct a campus waste assessment and develop a waste action plan.

DESCRIPTION

A university's approach to waste management is a highly-visible indicator of its dedication to principles of sustainability. While McGill has made some progress in the realm of waste reduction and management, progress has been limited by a lack of baseline knowledge concerning waste production and management across the entire waste system. To reach new milestones in waste reduction and earn points toward the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS), Buildings and Grounds will seek resources to conduct a campus waste assessment and to develop a waste action plan based on its findings in cooperation with the McGill community. The student-led McGill Waste Project will also support the implementation of this action. To leverage opportunities for waste reduction in the IT sector, Information Technology Services will also work to optimize the use of printers and other imaging devices across campus.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Buildings and Grounds will seek resources to a) conduct a campus waste assessment and issue recommendations, and b) to develop a waste action plan, informed by community engagement.
- The use of printing and imaging solutions will be optimized in order to improve energy consumption, efficiency, and reduce waste material.

PARTNERS

Building and Grounds; Information Technology Services; McGill Waste Project

ACTION 11:

ENERGY & CLIMATE

Develop an energy action plan.

DESCRIPTION

Long-standing efforts to reduce the size of its energy footprint have earned McGill recognition for its commitment to energy efficiency and emissions reduction. The development of a comprehensive Energy Action Plan, in alignment with the McGill's Environment Policy (2001) and Sustainability Policy (2010), will further establish the University as a leader in campus sustainability, particularly in areas of energy and climate action. Building on work led by the Utilities & Energy Management team in collaboration with institutional partners (such as Procurement Services and the Trottier Institute for Sustainable Engineering and Design (TISED)), as well as applied student research groups like the McGill Energy Project, University Services will systematically explore opportunities to measure, communicate, and further reduce McGill's absolute greenhouse gas emissions in the coming years.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Using the framework provided by McGill's Five-Year Energy Management Plan, the energy use and natural resource consumption of the building portfolio will be monitored and managed toward continuous improvement;
- McGill's strategies for reducing greenhouse gas emissions will be quantitatively and qualitatively benchmarked against those of peer universities; lessons learned from this benchmarking will iteratively shape McGill's climate action strategies;
- McGill's greenhouse gas emissions will be tracked and communicated;
- The carbon footprint of university-related travel will be tracked and reported to the community;
- University stakeholders will be engaged in consultation and collaboration towards the development of a comprehensive Energy Action Plan;
- The Energy Action Plan will be communicated to the McGill community and the implementation of its recommendations will begin.

PARTNERS

Utilities & Energy Management; Procurement Services; McGill Energy Project

GOVERNANCE & ADMINISTRATION

ACTION 12:

MONITORING & REPORTING

Develop a framework for monitoring & reporting on sustainability performance across the five categories of Vision 2020.

DESCRIPTION

Monitoring and reporting on sustainability is quickly becoming an international priority. Appropriately, McGill's Sustainability Policy (2010) outlines commitments to 1) prepare and regularly update a sustainability plan with specific goals and objectives; and 2) to establish sustainability indicators to enable accountability, to communicate specific goals, and to monitor and report on progress. Building on previous efforts to track progress toward sustainability at McGill, this action will ensure the development of a framework for sustainability monitoring and reporting that spans the five categories of Vision 2020. This framework, to be developed in consultation with key stakeholders, will give substance to McGill's existing Policy commitments and enable the University to better track sustainability performance, share stories, and identify strategic steps forward. The development of the framework will also help McGill to fill data gaps and subsequently report under the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS).

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Best practices on sustainability monitoring and reporting will be identified;
- Initial recommendations for a framework for sustainability monitoring and reporting at McGill will be made;
- A group of key stakeholders will validate a set of key performance indicators for sustainability and desirable reporting formats;
- An initial Sustainability Report will be completed and presented to the McGill community.

PARTNERS

McGill Office of Sustainability

ACTION 13:

SOCIALLY

RESPONSIBLE INVESTMENT

Convene a public consultation on the revision of the terms of reference of the Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility.

DESCRIPTION

Over the past decade, interest in socially responsible investment (SRI) has grown by leaps and bounds. Investors increasingly expect their social and environmental values to be reflected in investment decisions. Recognizing that SRI can take many forms, it is important that McGill weigh alternative SRI options for the McGill context, especially in light of recent discussions around fossil fuel divestment. In the short-term, there is an important opportunity for public dialogue on responsible investment at McGill around the revision of the terms of reference of McGill's Committee to Advise on Matters of Social Responsibility (CAMSR). In the coming years, these steps could help pave the way for the development of a responsible investment policy at McGill, which would earn points toward the AASHE Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS).

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- Public consultations will be conducted to provide members of the McGill community with an opportunity to submit their perspective on the draft revision of the CAMSR Terms of Reference.
- The members of CAMSR will be encouraged and supported to commission an independent review of best practices in the field of socially responsible investment, in accordance with the expanded mandate foreseen in the draft revision of the CAMSR Terms of Reference.

PARTNERS

McGill's Secretariat; McGill Office of Sustainability

ACTION 14:

ADVISORY COUNCIL ON SUSTAINABILITY

Establish an Advisory Council on Sustainability and name a Senior Advisor on Sustainability.

DESCRIPTION

In its Sustainability Policy (2010), McGill sets an ambitious sustainability agenda, aspiring to “achieve the highest possible standards of sustainability” and “become an institutional model of sustainability for society”. Experience at other universities, and more broadly in the field of community sustainability planning, indicates that strong leadership will be required to achieve these goals. Successful implementation of sustainability strategies like McGill’s must be led in a manner that works across boundaries between units and stakeholder groups, with the aim of fostering collaboration, efficiency, and shared responsibility. Establishing a governance body such as an Advisory Council on Sustainability is considered best practice in the field, and has been carried out at many of McGill’s peer institutions. A strong asset in this context could be the Vision 2020 Steering Committee, which could be transitioned into a permanent and formal Advisory Council. Establishing the Advisory Council would ensure that sustainability efforts at McGill are integrated, accelerated, and communicated effectively in the coming years.

DELIVERABLES FOR 2014-2016

- A Senior Advisor on Sustainability will be named;
- In consultation with key stakeholders, the Senior Advisor will propose a draft mandate, membership and draft terms of reference for the Advisory Council, for approval by the Senior Administration;
- The terms of reference for the Advisory Council will be formally approved;
- The Advisory Council will meet periodically and report to the McGill community on progress toward sustainability at McGill.

PARTNERS

To be confirmed

Note: To date no partners have confirmed for this action. The question of where the mandate for this action resides has yet to be resolved. Dialogue is ongoing to determine a way forward amongst different options.