CHAPTER 4
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL COLLEGIATE SPORTS GREENING PROGRAM

The following recommendations are based on lessons from some of the most well-developed sports greening initiatives on campuses across North America. These recommendations focus on helping college sport programs begin or build upon their environmental work. By implementing some of this advice, collegiate sports departments can gradually improve the efficiency of their operations, reduce overall environmental impacts, enhance their brands, diversify and strengthen sponsor relationships, and engage fans on this important issue. The recommendations below are diverse, as greening strategies vary by location, institutional priorities, partnership support, and on-campus resources.
1. ENGAGE DIVERSE CAMPUS STAKEHOLDERS

A successful sports greening program requires support from university leadership and diverse departments across campus. To encourage interdepartmental buy-in, sports greening initiatives should align with campus-wide sustainability goals. Start by researching institutional greening priorities, whether or not they are formal commitments. Inventory existing on-campus resources. Identify opportunities for sports departments to support broader campus objectives, such as “zero waste” goals or greenhouse gas reduction goals. These initiatives should aim to be measurable, with clear plans for implementation. Quantifying the impact of sports greening projects can help attract institutional funding and build campus-wide support.

Recognize that each campus department—athletics, recreation, facilities, construction, and sustainability, among others—has different staff, budget, expertise, incentives, and priorities. These factors influence interdepartmental interest in and support for sports greening efforts. Listen to the needs of all stakeholders. Take the time to learn how they do things and why. Tailor greening objectives and plans according to the challenges that different departments and facilities may face. Consider testing new efforts on a small scale first (such as at a single game or in a specific venue), to demonstrate feasibility, gather feedback, build confidence, and gain stronger support. Then develop plans to roll out greening initiatives on a larger scale (such as throughout a season of competition or across several facilities).

The following graphic provides a snapshot of the variety of on- and off-campus stakeholders that can contribute to a successful greening program within the athletics and/or recreation departments on your campus. As the titles, responsibilities, and organizational structure of these groups vary significantly from campus to campus, this is only an example of potential sports greening partners and the assets each may offer. Consider mapping out your own network by identifying the various stakeholders that could benefit your campus sports greening efforts. These partners can bring resources to the table, such as funding, staff time and/or volunteers, expertise, legitimacy, connections, outreach and/or marketing support, sponsorship, infrastructure, and experience. Evaluate the value existing or potential partners could bring to your program.
STUDENT-LED SPORTS GREENING PROJECT IDEAS

Students can help attract support for sports greening on your campus by leading new projects. Work with facility managers and other athletics or recreation staff to launch or expand your varsity or club team’s greening work. Below are some project ideas to consider. These initiatives are often relatively easy to implement and can help build interest in broader infrastructure and operational greening.

- **RECYCLING AND GREENER TAILGATING**: Create a green team of student volunteers to collect recyclables during games and tailgates. Also consider handing out bags to tailgaters for collecting recyclables, then picking up the bags later or designating drop-off stations nearby.
  - See University of Oregon case study and Penn State and University of Southern California snapshots for examples.

- **FOOD DONATION PROGRAM**: Instead of throwing away unused food, establish a donation program following athletic events to send untouched leftover food to a nearby food bank or another place of need. Contact your local food bank, visit Feeding America (feedingamerica.org) for information about food banks near you, or visit Rock and Wrap It Up! (rockandwrapitup.org) for information on its college donation program.
  - See Columbia snapshot for an example.

- **SPORTS GEAR RECYCLING DRIVE OR DONATION PROGRAM**: Start a recycling drive encouraging students to donate, exchange, or sell used sports gear. Consider arranging campus-wide sports gear donation events (including clothes, shoes, and equipment) to benefit local schools or places of need. Ask the athletic equipment manager(s) to contribute any unused or outdated team gear. There are also several programs—such as Reuse-a-Shoe (www.nike.com/us/en_us/c/better-world/stories/2013/05/reuse-a-shoe) and Shoebox Recycling (shoeboxrecycling.com)—that can provide collection bins for used shoes to install in sports facilities.
  - See Bowdoin College and University of Pennsylvania snapshots for examples.

- **ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION CAMPAIGN**: Create signs for all athletic facilities to educate fans and athletes about easy things they can do to reduce energy, recycle, etc. Post more detailed posters in high-traffic areas such as locker rooms, gyms, and elevators. Partner with the sports marketing manager(s) to design a sports greening program brand with a name and logo to help publicize your sports greening accomplishments and encourage people to get involved.
  - See Yale and CU-Boulder case studies for examples.

- **COMPOSTING PROGRAM**: Create a green team of student volunteers to set up stations for food waste from tailgates. Consider also handing out bags for tailgaters to use to collect their own compost, then picking them up later or designating drop-off stations nearby. Partner with the campus waste department to arrange to haul bags of food waste to on-campus or off-campus compost centers.
  - See Ohio State case study and University of Texas snapshot for examples.

- **E-WASTE DRIVE**: Host a used electronics recycling event at a major sports event. Arrange to have a local e-Stewards–certified recycler to help collect and haul the waste. Publicize the event well in advance, with outreach to all teams, dorms, and campus departments. Circulate notices with information about the kinds of electronic waste that will be accepted, and post signage at the event with pictures of acceptable items.
  - See NCAA section of “Regional Efforts” chapter for examples.

### 2. INVOLVE STUDENTS

Students can help advance collegiate sports greening efforts in many ways. Encourage students to take ownership of the research and planning for sports greening initiatives. This can reduce demands on staff time and departmental resources. Seek student input when designing new facilities; developing a better understanding of users’ needs can help improve building performance. Engage students majoring in environmental studies, sports management, and/or marketing to develop creative, perhaps humorous outreach that helps to keep fans engaged and prevent “messaging fatigue.” Students have valuable insights about the best ways to appeal to their peers. Student involvement can also help attract support from faculty, campus administration, and other departments.

To attract volunteers for sports greening projects, offer students hands-on work experience that can benefit their resumes. Present options for students to make short-term commitments as game-day recycling staff (“green teams”) or longer-term commitments as research interns. Recognize volunteers with in-game announcements and online shout-outs. Consider providing “green team” gear (T-shirts or hats) to reward volunteers, and/or host an annual thank-you event (with healthy food and “zero waste” goals). Also, establish a system for students to report about each project that they manage. File their reports to record progress and allow for smoother transitions from year to year as students graduate.

### 3. RECRUIT GREENING CHAMPIONS WITHIN ATHLETICS AND RECREATION

Many athletics and recreation greening initiatives are launched by a single student or staff member motivated to implement change. Ultimately, however, a successful sports greening initiative needs to be embedded in the culture of the athletic and recreation departments. Host a meeting for all interested students and staff to recruit multiple greening champions for ongoing support and input. Solicit campus-wide buy-in. One way to involve staff at different levels is to create environmental mission statements for the athletic and recreation departments that support broader campus-wide sustainability goals. Develop environmentally preferable purchasing policies and vendor contracts for greening champions to rely on in order to support your environmental goals.

### 4. AUDIT YOUR WASTE GENERATION AND ENERGY, WATER, AND PAPER USE TO SAVE MONEY

Work with facilities staff to commission energy, water, and waste audits to identify opportunities for resource conservation and financial savings in your sports facilities. During an energy or water efficiency audit, a trained engineer conducts an analysis of your facilities and identifies opportunities for enhanced efficiency that will likely save your department (or institution) money and improve your environmental performance. (While energy audits can be very involved and require a high degree of training, facilities or other staff on your campus may have the expertise to conduct these audits. Or check with your local utility to see if it provides free energy or water audits.) Use the data collected to determine the financial and operational feasibility of various infrastructure upgrades and improvements to building management systems. This information will help prioritize infrastructure upgrades for your sports venues based on the estimated return on investment. Similarly, audit waste generation and paper use to identify efficiency opportunities in those areas.
5. START WITH SPORTS GREENING EFFORTS THAT HAVE THE FASTEST RETURN ON INVESTMENT

Start with cost-saving environmental initiatives to help garner athletics department and institutional support. Improved efficiency means less waste, which often translates into cost savings as well as energy, water, and other resource savings. Meet with facilities and operations managers to identify “low-hanging fruit” upgrades, some of which may already have been implemented in other campus buildings. A sports greening program that begins with financially sound environmental initiatives—such as upgrading to more efficient lighting fixtures, double-sided paper copies, printing less frequently, or installing water-efficient fixtures and appliances—will help the program gain momentum by cutting costs and help attract interest for other greening opportunities. If possible, minimize infrastructure upgrade costs by purchasing new products (such as LED lights) in bulk for multiple facilities. Keep track of savings and publicize them to staff and the administration to encourage lasting behavior change. For example, record decreases in copier paper orders, calculate the money saved, and congratulate staff for their achievement.

6. MEASURE YOUR OPERATIONS

Track environmental data such as energy and water use, waste generation, and paper use to assess facility performance and identify opportunities for resource savings. Consistent data tracking across all sports facilities also allows you to set short- and longer-term goals and compare ongoing performance with past performance. Quantify successes to determine where your greening investments are making the most impact and inspire your department to make further investments.

Some institutions have campus-wide tracking systems to measure energy consumption, water use, and waste disposal recycling. Where available, submetering energy in campus buildings can provide more specific data to help identify the most energy-intensive equipment or programs within a facility. Take advantage of your campus’s data gathering systems and any submetering initiatives. If your campus hasn’t yet implemented an environmental measurement system, you can track your facilities’ resource use with tools like the EPA’s Portfolio Manager and WasteWise programs. Or you can develop spreadsheets specific to each facility with data supplied by utilities, vendors, and service providers. Partner with campus facilities or other staff to enhance your measurement system and data analyses.

7. RECOGNIZE THAT A SHIFT TO ENVIRONMENTALLY PREFERABLE PRODUCTS AND OPERATIONS TAKES TIME

Goods and services supplied in the marketplace are created using infrastructure that has been built up over many decades. This infrastructure often includes environmentally harmful production practices, and it may be supported by environmentally harmful subsidies, regulations, and vendor relationships that can make it difficult to implement change. Some environmental initiatives, such as energy efficiency audits, educational signs about conservation, and paper reduction measures, can progress quickly. But other adjustments, such as changing energy-consuming technologies, measuring impacts, shifting to postconsumer recycled-content paper products, procuring compostable serviceware, developing a recycling-based waste management system, and providing ecologically preferable food service, can take a few years to implement.

This should not deter you from taking the small steps needed to make gradual progress. Give athletics and recreation departments the time they need to make these adjustments. Let the initiative unfold as slowly as needed to maintain staff comfort and proper training and to respect existing vendor commitments and budgetary restrictions. Frame greening goals as aspirational, and focus on gradual, continuous improvement to relieve concerns staff may have about achieving campus-wide sustainability commitments in a short time frame. This will help assure the longevity, stability, and buy-in of the greening program. Moreover, longer-range planning allows athletics and recreation departments to consider investing in capital improvements that will save money over time.

8. REALIZE THAT GREENING IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION

Greening means reviewing your operations and procurement with an eye toward reducing environmental impacts. It is an iterative, ongoing process. Greening means more than following a checklist, although checklists can be useful. Greening also means integrating environmental criteria into ongoing decisions about operations and the procurement of products and services. Where possible, integrate environmental criteria into purchasing policies, vendor contracts, and organizational reporting. Frame greening goals as aspirational, to encourage ongoing improvement.
Greening is a continuously evolving endeavor because more efficient, environmentally preferable products and services enter the market all the time. If you aren’t able to find the product or service that meets your environmental needs, keep looking, and let your vendors know what you want; chances are that the product will be available before long. Educating staff, students, fans, vendors, and partners is also an ongoing process. By visualizing green as a journey, you can celebrate accomplishments along the way and create a flexible initiative that responds to changes in institutional priorities and takes advantage of innovations in the marketplace.

9. ENLIST SPONSORS, VENDORS, AND OTHER PARTNERS

Engage external groups early on and strategically to take advantage of all available expertise and funding when planning your sports greening efforts. Inform existing and potential partners of plans for new greening initiatives. Welcome input from strategically selected vendors, sponsors, nonprofits, and local organizations that may have greening expertise and resources. Communicate your financial limits and environmental priorities. Clarify why changes are being considered, how partners might provide support, and what results are expected. Identify and exploit opportunities for joint benefits and outreach.

Encourage the development of new sponsorships around green. Greening can broaden sponsorship opportunities with existing or new partners who want to affiliate with your goals of environmental stewardship. Inviting sponsors and vendors can provide financial, organizational, and media support for your goals. These partners may bring funding, advertisements, infrastructure, and products to your greening effort. Consider using a competitive bidding process to solicit innovative proposals from concessionaires and other vendors, encouraging them to bolster their proposals with greener features. Also consider working with marketing staff to improve the fan experience as part of greening efforts. Inviting your sponsors, vendors, and local NGOs sends a valuable signal to the marketplace and your community that environmental issues are important to your institution.

10. USE GREENING FOR BRANDING ENHANCEMENT

Consistent branding, communicating the program’s mission, and publicizing successes help attract program supporters and partners. Establish a program name, logo, and perhaps a mission statement at the outset of your program. Ensure that initiatives are effectively and accurately publicized (it’s okay to exhibit pride in your achievements, but don’t overstate your successes) and use positive, authentic messages that appeal to your audience.

Greening initiatives can provide opportunities for fans to interact with teams in their community. Fan engagement can be as basic as incorporating visible and well-marked recycling bins at a stadium, inviting community participation in green events (such as sports gear donation drives), or featuring ongoing displays at a sports facility. Public service announcements or other broadcast initiatives can also yield great fan response. Some athletics and recreation departments (and professional leagues and teams) have modified their websites and social media outreach to engage fans in their greening initiatives. Some communities coordinate sports greening initiatives with community goals and information-sharing. Build a culture of sustainability at sports events. Use simple, consistent signage that is integrated with other fan education initiatives (e.g., posters, public address announcements, videos).

11. NEVER GREENWASH

Communicate success stories and challenges authentically, and never greenwash. Exaggerating your environmental achievements will undermine confidence in your good work and do long-term damage to your sports greening program and brand. There is no shame in announcing a small accomplishment, or in describing challenges along with goals. Indeed, all we can do are small things; no single business undertaking can solve our many ecological problems. However small our day-to-day actions may seem, whether it’s buying products made with recycled content, using renewable energy, or conserving water, our collective steps add up to meaningful regional and global impacts. Clearly, everyone has to do something, regardless of how small it might seem, to reduce his or her ecological footprint and encourage others to do the same.

12. LEARN FROM PEERS AND EXPERTS

Several national organizations can offer support by sharing information about successful greening practices in place at athletic and recreation facilities across the country. Learn from your peers’ experiences, and take advantage of existing nonprofit resources—including those provided by NRDC, AASHE, the EPA, the Green Sports Alliance, and NIRSA—to help provide strategies, data collection tools, and advice on greener products, technologies, and processes. Gather information from other university departments, staff members, and students.

To get started today on greening your sports department, facility, team, or event, consult the NRDC Greening Advisor at www.greensports.org for in-depth suggestions on how to adopt greener practices. The Greening Advisor is a free, online guide that helps sports programs implement environmentally intelligent practices to improve the efficiency of operations, uncover opportunities to cut costs, enhance brands, and benefit public health. It covers everything from energy audits and water conservation to purchasing, transportation, and waste management.
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR SUSTAINABILITY STAFF

Greening college sports holds the potential to transcend departmental divides on campuses. The following strategies aim to help sustainability-focused staff collaborate better with athletics departments and help environmental stewardship become part of daily campus life.

1. DO YOUR RESEARCH

Before approaching athletics staff, do your homework. Understand the systems already in place and be prepared to build the case for sports greening. Below are some suggested questions to investigate. This information will help you understand the athletics department’s motivations, objectives, and interests.

- What are the operational issues most important to the athletics department? What are the primary building management objectives in the short and medium term? This is crucial for aligning greening goals with the athletics department’s existing priorities.
- What green efforts are already in place at athletic facilities? Inventory existing green procurement practices, resource-efficient equipment, green building features or certifications, green outreach, and other sustainability efforts accomplished by athletics. Start by congratulating athletics staff on their accomplishments to date.
- Who funds the athletics department? This might be a source of funding for greening efforts. Who pays the athletics department’s utility bills? This will indicate who is most interested in auditing energy and water use in athletic facilities.
- Does the athletics department have sponsors and an outside concessionaire? If so, who are they and how might they be brought into the greening program? Existing sponsors and vendors may have environmental commitments or green product lines. They are a potential source of funding for environmental projects.
- Who are the typical users and maintenance staff for each athletic facility? When was each facility built or most recently upgraded, and what type of technologies does each have? This will inform opportunities for infrastructure upgrades or renovations.
- Are there any prominent student-athlete or public concerns about air or water quality in the region or at athletic facilities? This may provide an opportunity to improve athlete health and performance with an indoor environmental quality assessment and upgrade.

2. BUILD YOUR CASE

Communicate the value of sports greening as a means of meeting the athletics department’s existing objectives. The athletics department will devote staff time and resources to greening work only when its leadership understands the value of greening. Build a strong case for sports greening by identifying the benefits it can provide for athletics. Consider which benefits are the most appealing when engaging each division of the department, and prioritize accordingly. For example, sports greening can help:

- save money on facility operations
- attract new sponsors
- expand existing sponsorships
- build greater fan loyalty
- enhance athlete health and performance with higher-performance buildings
- attract new donors
- strengthen alumni connections
- bolster community ties to potentially increase ticket sales
- offer a strong platform for environmental education
- strengthen interdepartmental ties, including with faculty
- achieve campus-wide sustainability goals
- boost the athletics department brand

3. OFFER SOLUTIONS, OPPORTUNITIES, AND SUPPORT

Sustainability is a confusing term. Provide athletics with concrete sports greening project examples. Point to successful initiatives at similar peer institutions. Present a menu of greening opportunities for athletics to choose from. Indicate available resources and partners on and off campus for successful implementation. Help identify the assets these partners can provide for sports greening work, including funding, expertise, infrastructure, project legitimacy, and outreach support. Don’t assume athletics staff will have the time or resources to run a new greening program. Offer ongoing staff support and/or help recruit student interns and volunteers.

4. UNCOVER CHAMPIONS

Identify athletics staff members and/or student-athletes who demonstrate a personal interest in protecting the environment. They may have additional insight into opportunities for athletics department greening work. Reach out to a variety of stakeholders within athletics, such as administrative staff, coaches, athletes, marketing and development staff, and custodial and grounds staff. Approach these potential “champions” by applauding their current green initiatives and then offering them additional greening opportunities.

5. HELP STRATEGIZE ON FUNDING, AND IDENTIFY POSSIBLE SPONSORS

Help athletics align with campus-wide sustainability commitments, and identify any available campus funds for sports greening initiatives (such as a university president’s sustainability fund). Investigate whether there are accessible local, state, or federal subsidies for renewable energy or other athletics greening work. Assist athletics in identifying new or existing sponsors with commitments that may align with an athletics greening program. Help investigate payback periods for infrastructure upgrades, and encourage athletics to set aside savings on utility bills for further green investments.