



ENGAGEMENT

CREATING AND COMMUNICATING A SUSTAINABILITY CULTURE



Integrating outreach into our iCAP themes is instrumental in establishing a campus sustainability culture. Even the most concerted efforts to implement environmental policy cannot gain traction without support from the entire community — from students, staff, and faculty members to local stakeholders and governing bodies.

Our engagement strategy is two-pronged, providing 1) clear and palatable information; and 2) outlets for response. A key example of the first prong is the iCAP Portal, established in 2012 to communicate progress toward iCAP objectives. The second strategy is exemplified by the iCAP Working Group (iWG); members of the iWG provide consistent opportunities for feedback to their affiliated organizations and departments.

iSEE facilitates numerous public engage-

ment programs. For the past six years, the Institute has collaborated with other campus units to host an annual Congress event. The public conference assembles leading national and international scientists, scholars, and activists to speak on grand sustainability challenges. Most recently, “Congress 2019: Sustainability Justice” addressed social equity and environmental activism.

iSEE also maintains a tabling presence at events of campuswide interest, including

Quad Day, Environmental Quad Day, the All-Employee Expo, and the Humanities Expo.

In spring 2020, iSEE published the latest version of the Certified Green Office Program (CGOP), in which offices and units can choose a sustainability ambassador, take simple steps to reduce emissions and resource use, and earn a certificate for their efforts. Similar programs for campus laboratories, Registered Student Organizations (RSO), and Greek life are also underway. Additionally, iSEE launched a “Campus as a Living Laboratory” (CALL) seed funding program in February 2018. The CALL program links campus sustainability goals with national targets and engages researchers with iCAP objectives by using project sites as research test beds.

Campus and community involvement was

prioritized in this iteration of the iCAP. To further increase iCAP visibility, we must integrate sustainability programming into all departments and units — not just those directly involved in the drafting process. Rather than a mere series of mandates, campus environmental policy should grow into a movement that is embraced, encouraged, and celebrated.

Equally important to increasing engagement is communicating clearly and often. Past iCAP messaging has been concentrated in the months surrounding publication — a short surge every five years followed by a period of silence. Moving forward, we will strengthen our communication efforts to continuously reiterate the iCAP’s presence and remind our community that progress is ongoing.

“We have not only the opportunity, but also the responsibility to make the changes necessary for a sustainable future. The iCAP 2020 is the foundation needed to make these changes and just the beginning of an even bigger sustainable movement.”

— Madalyn Liberman ’21

- 7.1 Green Certifications
- 7.2 Sustainable Events Program
- 7.3 Green Sports Alliance
- 7.4 Local Collaborations
- 7.5 Support Youth Sustainability
- 7.6 iCAP Portal Updates

Engagement Objectives

The following Engagement objectives were developed by the SWATeams, iCAP Working Group, campus community, and Sustainability Council to guide the university's actions toward expanding outreach efforts and strengthening our culture of sustainability.



The University of Illinois is an active and passionate community. In September 2019, students, staff, and faculty members marched in support of environmental issues such as fossil fuel divestment.

7.1 [iSEE] Enhance the overall culture of sustainability on campus, and increase the number of certifications issued through the Certified Greener Campus Program by 20% each year from FY20 to FY24.

In keeping with our overarching iCAP goals, we place great importance on fostering an enduring culture of sustainability among our students, staff, and faculty members.

To date, the biggest proponents of a sustainability culture are the student groups and RSOs focused on environmental topics. Since the 1969 founding of Students for Environmental Concerns (SECS),¹⁴⁰ passionate students have been our vital environmental pulse. Moving forward, we will continue to support and grow our impressive array of sustainability-affiliated organizations; we will bolster existing events, initiatives, and recruitment efforts through lending our voices, resources, and time. We will also work to facilitate opportunities for networking and collaboration between our many RSOs.

One way to quantify and track our progress toward this objective is through iSEE's Certified Green Office Program (CGOP). The CGOP is a guided program for academic offices to implement long-term sustainability solutions. By managing the process from start to finish, participating staff and faculty members receive an active education in best practices for maintaining a green office. We aim to expand this initiative by including options for Green RSOs, Green Greek Chapters, and Green Labs.

The most recent version of the CGOP was

launched in spring 2020. The next step is communicating this opportunity to campus units. We plan to increase awareness through branded videos, digital signage, and other marketing materials. Many campus units have already committed to pursuing Green Office certification, and we are proud of their efforts to implement solutions and spread the word to peers and colleagues. To shine a light on the contributions that individual departments are making as a result of their certification, we will disseminate monthly progress reports emphasizing strategies implemented through the CGOP and linking these efforts to the iCAP objectives.

7.2 [Illini Union] The Illini Union and Illini Union Board commit to 80% of their events qualifying as sustainable by FY24.

The reach of Illini Union events go beyond the event itself; it is the goal that all attendees will be exposed to sustainability efforts and carry this knowledge to incorporate at their own events, offices, and households. A comprehensive sustainable event guide will be developed and standardized, including actions such as serving local food with meatless options, going paperless, eliminating disposable items, providing reusable giveaways, and communicating the priority of sustainability at the event. For this objective, we may partner with the Department of Recreation, Sport & Tourism (RST) to develop and incorporate sustainable practices into a module of the Event Planning course. RST undergraduate and graduate students can work as event consultants for Illini Union Board events.

“I believe student involvement in university decisions is extremely important because our tuition should fund projects that are ethical and focus on intergenerational sustainability. More than ever before, our actions will determine the state of the environment and society’s attitudes toward environmental protection in the coming decades. I am excited for the campus community to become more involved in the implementation of iCAP 2020, as well as other sustainability initiatives!”

— Anneli Cers '21

¹⁴⁰ Then called Students for Environmental Controls.

7.3 [DIA] Increase visibility of campus sustainability efforts by joining the Green Sports Alliance through the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics (DIA) by summer 2021.

An important step to reduce the university’s environmental footprint involves the Division of Intercollegiate Athletics (DIA). The Urbana campus is home to 11 major athletic complexes seating up to 84,000 spectators. Joining the Green Sports Alliance would allow us to share resources, experiences, and best practices through a collaborative network of sports organizations. The Alliance focuses primarily on seven program initiatives: energy, food, procurement, transportation, venues, waste, and water. Joining the Alliance would help promote an eco-friendly environment for our teams, venues, athletes, and fans.

In keeping with our national position as a sustainability leader among land-grant universities, merging our environmental efforts and strong athletic culture is an enormously effective step. Outside of graduation and student welcoming ceremonies, DIA hosts the largest on-campus gatherings each year. Thus, these events provide great opportunities to reach a large, captive audience with sustainability messaging. Joining the Green Sports Alliance reflects our commitment to elevate environmental awareness where it counts. Through a partnership with DIA, we can reduce water and energy consumption, cut down on waste, promote natural resource management, and pursue a complementary Illinois identity of sporting excellences and sustainability leadership.

7.4 [iSEE] Incorporate sustainability-related problem solving in the GivePulse system for public engagement, and track local collaborations for sustainable solutions. Increase local collaborations by 10% per year from FY22 to FY24.

A recurring theme throughout our iCAP objectives is the need for outreach that equips as well as informs. We strive to pair each engagement effort with resource-backed infrastructure to facilitate the transition to independent, stand-alone management. Local collaborations are a perfect example of this, as they rely on cooperation from individuals both in and outside the university.

When considering opportunities for local collaboration, we begin by empowering university members to think critically and creatively about sustainability issues close to home. Fortunately, we have extensive depth and breadth of knowledge right here on campus; for example, faculty members who either possess a working knowledge of local resources or are conducting community-based participatory research.

In addition to university faculty members, we aim to introduce co-curricular sustainability partnerships between students and community groups with an emphasis on developing problem-solving skills and design thinking strategies. These tools are valuable in many situations and are already integrated into undergraduate curricula. We believe that pairing theoretical training with practical, real-world experience strikes the optimal balance

for productive collaboration.

The second component to successful local collaboration is identifying a need for resources and logistical support. For example, an opportunity for collaboration might involve overcoming barriers to community food waste composting in Urbana. Requirements for such a project may include researching EPA regulations for implementing a composting program, organizing forums to gather feedback and gauge public interest, running workshops to provide training, obtaining sufficient funding and equipment, and amassing the entrepreneurial experience to see the project through.

We hope to challenge the mindset of, “we don’t have this resource in our community, so it cannot be done.” Whether the result is a sustainable landscaping solution, green infrastructure installation, or public awareness campaign, we want to expedite and encourage as many diverse local collaborations as possible.

This objective’s key metric is the total number of local collaborative projects. We will track our progress through GivePulse,¹⁴¹ an online platform allowing us to obtain key information regarding which projects are underway, who is participating, and whether each project is successful. In addition to functioning as a database, GivePulse can also match individuals to volunteering opportunities and organizations to interested volunteers, providing many avenues to scale up our impact.

¹⁴¹ <https://www.givepulse.com/about>

¹⁴² <https://bit.ly/3hQE46F>

7.5 [Extension] Support programs to develop love of nature and sustainability among children, with an annual Youth Sustainability Summit led by local teenagers with guidance and mentoring from campus and community sustainability leaders.

In our efforts to reach community members, we must remain vigilant to the crucial role that children, teenagers, and young adults play in shaping our society’s environmental values.

This objective provides local youth with a sustainability “compass.” Embedded within our strategies is another key opportunity: encouraging positive peer mentoring and collaboration between students of all ages — from first grade through high school. The City of Urbana Sustainability Advisory Commission¹⁴² currently facilitates an annual Youth Sustainability Summit. Led by local teenagers under the guidance of campus and community sustainability experts, the summit provides a unique opportunity for students of all academic stages to think critically and decisively about environmental issues.

In addition to independently organized programs like the Summit, we hope to lean on the many opportunities to foster connections between local students and university scholars. During their time on campus, many undergrad and graduate students participate in programs that involve imparting wisdom and life skills to younger generations. Previously, groups such as Illini Mentoring, Eat4Health, and the

Sustainability Living Learning Community have visited local schools to present on sustainability topics. Keeping health and safety precautions in mind, we want to encourage similar programs when it becomes safe to do so and continue to provide opportunities for our students to serve as peer educators in the community.

Educational opportunities outside the classroom are the third key component to achieving this objective. More so than simply providing local youth with information, we will offer rich and interactive educational experiences: for example, a “Composting 101” event, or an interactive workshop on reusing glass bottles as planters. We will support these programs by crafting marketing campaigns, incentivizing participation, and gathering information to measure success and identify areas for improvement.

It has been said that “children are the future,” which rings ever true in the context of sustainability. Ultimately, we hope to guide children toward environmental stewardship by instilling within them lifelong sustainability values: a passion for nature, consciousness of individual action, and the tools to commu-

nicate what they’ve learned.

7.6 [iSEE and F&S] Update the iCAP Portal on a monthly basis to report progress toward iCAP objectives.

Whether they target students, staff, faculty members, or the community, all of our engagement efforts are orchestrated to support the iCAP objectives. Our strategies are multi-faceted and reach virtually all corners of campus, but they remain unified in their connection to our overarching Climate Leadership Commitments.

As we engage campus in our sustainability efforts, we want to constantly remind our Illinois community of why their actions matter in the grand scheme of the university. This objective will take the form of a regularly scheduled update on our progress toward the iCAP objectives, perhaps in the form of a newsletter distributed by upper-level campus administration. Each iteration might focus on a different aspect of campus sustainability, taking care to directly link on-campus action (especially the actions most recognizable by the newsletter’s recipients) to measurable iCAP metrics.

Conclusion

As is the case with environmental issues at large, we are all in this together. The mandates included in this action plan pertain specifically to the Urbana campus, but our efforts to provide informative and engaging outreach should also extend to the community.

Leaning on and collaborating with local interest groups through research, youth engagement, and events is invaluable to our programs’ lasting success. In addition to iCAP-specific outcomes, we hope that our efforts will culti-

vate an intergenerational appreciation for sustainability, energy, and the environment.

The sustainability conversation is not and should not be one-sided. Our efforts to inform must be paired with efforts to engage, empower, and most importantly, encourage constructive feedback. The result will be a community well-equipped with strength, durability, and resolve to continue pushing for environmental progress in the coming years.



iSEE Congress 2019: Sustainability Justice united a diverse panel of experts to speak on climate justice and environmental activism.