

Vision 2020: Moving Beyond the Plan

The SPF Final Report

Looking Back

Vision 2020 was incredibly ambitious, and while we can point to many concrete outcomes of the project, its impact is really more broad and significant than a report can easily summarize. As the largest, most far-reaching, and collaborative sustainability project ever undertaken at McGill, it has involved over 1500 participants engaged by a project team of 10 and a steering committee of 25. It has given rise to dozens of new partnerships, cross-cutting conversations, experimental gatherings, and a greatly expanded communications program. Countless friendships and professional connections have been established around the exploration of sustainability, and the freshly branded Sustainability at McGill has gained serious traction on both the grassroots and administrative levels. Importantly, Vision 2020 gave rise to McGill's first ever official [Sustainability Strategy](#).

Stepping back and looking at all of this together, we can see that Vision 2020 has essentially changed the sustainability game at McGill. With a crowd-sourced and administration-vetted vision for sustainability, 23 goals to strive for, and 14 priority actions to focus on, we have what we need to move forward concretely in the coming years. With the less tangible but immensely important connectivity amongst groups that has been fostered through the Vision 2020 process, we're better equipped to make it happen together. For more on this, please have a look at our closing video [here](#) and read the summary of our progress in the report below.

Revisiting Our Objectives

Through *Vision 2020: Moving Beyond the Plan* we set out to accomplish three objectives:

1. To finalize a Sustainability Strategy for McGill University;
2. To establish and institutionalize an Oversight Body and five Sustainability Hubs¹ to oversee and drive implementation of the Strategy;
3. To develop resources for unit-level sustainability action planning and facilitate localized action planning with various groups.

For each of these objectives, we also set out to accomplish a series of deliverables. Below is a description of the team's progress on each objective and associated deliverables, followed by key lessons learned over the course of the project. See Table 1 for a summary of progress toward each of the 12 project deliverables.

Objective #1. To finalize a Sustainability Strategy for McGill University: complete.

On March 21st, 2014, McGill's senior leadership team, consisting of the Principal, Provost, and other senior administrators, officially approved McGill's first ever sustainability strategy, *Vision 2020: A Sustainability Strategy for McGill University*.

This process took longer than anticipated. After submitting a first draft to the senior administration team in November 2013, we received some very constructive feedback that highlighted a few areas in need of change. We took the next four months to work intensively with our amazing [Steering Committee](#) of students, staff and faculty to clarify our definition of sustainability and refine our list of actions from an original list of 51 to 14, each selected on the basis of relevant criteria. We also met with stakeholders to refine wording on each of the actions, specify roles, and discuss accountability. Finally, we set deliverables for the next two years rather than five. This process led to a shorter, more focused strategy, which the senior administration team enthusiastically approved this spring. The Sustainability Strategy was also presented to McGill's Senate and Board of Governor's.

¹One hub per Vision 2020 category: Research, Education, Connectivity, Operations, and Administration & Governance.

Sub-deliverable. To develop a costing plan for Senior Administration: **cancelled.**

Given that we were developing a Sustainability Strategy rather than a detailed implementation plan, this deliverable was deemed unnecessary by the senior administration team. Individual units who have agreed to steward actions within their portfolios will be responsible for costing moving forward.

Sub-deliverable. To launch projects that align with the Sustainability Strategy: **complete.**

The Sustainability Strategy includes 14 priority actions to be implemented by a network of partners over the period 2014-2016. The document [Priority Action Briefs 2014-2016](#) describes each of these actions in detail, alongside a set of deliverables. Partners have already begun work on many of these actions, and our team has supported both the identification and initiation of these priority actions.

Recognizing that administrative partners will lead many of these projects, we have also sought to support projects initiated by students and other administrative groups working on projects beyond the Sustainability Strategy. Notably, we have been exploring opportunities for collaboration with Campus Life and Engagement, the Social Equity and Diversity Education Office, the Rez Project, and the Post Graduate Students' Association. In the spirit of bringing groups together to stimulate dialogue and celebrate accomplishments related to our vision and goals, we also held *Lift Off: La Soirée Développement Durable* in November 2013. Over 200 people participated in an evening of interactive installations, local food and drink, story-telling and performance related to the five categories of sustainability established through Vision 2020: Research, Education, Connectivity, Operations, and Governance & Administration.

Objective #2. To establish and institutionalize an Oversight Body and five Sustainability Hubs to oversee and drive implementation of the Strategy: **in progress.**

Oversight body: While an oversight body was not established in the past year, we have made significant strides towards this objective and work is still in progress. Notably, Action 14 in the Sustainability Strategy is to: "Establish an Advisory Council on Sustainability and name a Senior Advisor on Sustainability." To this end, we have sent a proposal for the establishment of an Advisory Council to Principal Suzanne Fortier, supported by the Vice Principal Administration & Finance, Michael Di Grappa. As of the close of Vision 2020 we are still awaiting a response, however anticipate receiving one in summer 2014. The McGill Office of Sustainability is committed to stewarding this process going forward, and intends to complete this action before 2016.

Sustainability hubs: From the beginning of Vision 2020 we knew that connectivity was crucial to fostering a culture of sustainability at McGill. To this end, and recognizing that many sustainability initiatives at McGill are isolated and disconnected from each other, we decided to convene five "hub" meetings for each of the five categories of sustainability that emerged during the Vision 2020 process. The idea to convene hubs was inspired by some interesting models of connected communities working together in *labs*. The University of Waterloo's Social Innovation Generation website describes the lab idea [here](#): "put simply, labs are intense meetings of diverse groups of people who are searching for break-through solutions to serious problems."

In Fall 2013, we hosted five exploratory hub meetings. To each, we invited a carefully selected and eclectic mix of students, staff, and faculty who were already working in each area but who may not have been aware of each other's efforts. Our goal for these sessions was to surface a desire to work together to advance sustainability in a given category, and then to identify opportunities for unconventional partnerships in the future.

As of summer 2014, the hubs are no longer active, in part because of several lessons we learned from our pilot phase (see our [blog](#) for more). More specifically, while most participants could easily point to the need for a more connected sustainability network at McGill, we discovered a few hurdles to forming a purposeful network of sustainability champions. While those who arrived were curious, open-minded, and ready to explore, conflicting schedules and ambiguity around the exact purpose of the meeting resulted in patchy attendance and follow-through. Additionally, stewarding the emergence of these hubs with limited Vision 2020

coordination capacity and a project end date looming too ambitious. Clear next steps didn't materialize straight across the board, and a new steward of the process wasn't easily identified.

In the end we felt that more time was needed for the maturation of the idea, and for further consideration of how such diverse groups of people in these five categories could form a coherent, adaptable, and interesting sustainability network. For now these groups are in contact via periodic emails flagging interesting and hub-relevant events. We trust that the value of the idea is there, and that interesting models of connectivity will emerge over time.

Objective #3. To develop resources for unit-level sustainability action planning and facilitate localized action planning with various groups: **in progress.**

When *Vision 2020: Moving Beyond the Plan* began, we were interested in working with different groups across campus to develop their own plans for sustainability and/or for individuals to voice their personal commitments to sustainability. The idea was to reach those who had less direct involvement with the Sustainability Strategy. To meet this objective we were committed to exploring several different avenues, and therefore committed to several deliverables.

Sub-deliverable. Develop an online platform to register public commitments and to plug actions and projects into a living process: **cancelled.**

We decided to cancel this stream of work because 1) the idea was not mature enough (i.e., no clear "value add" to sustainability work more broadly), and 2) it exceeded team capacity in light of delays associated with the approval of the Sustainability Strategy.

Sub-deliverable. Develop resources to enable sub-institutional sustainability action planning: **complete.**

To complete this deliverable, we decided to focus on developing resources for the McGill Office of Sustainability's website to help people "Get Involved". Working with a Vision 2020 intern, we developed introductory educational materials for sustainability in the McGill context, and also curated resources from beyond McGill. Please see the Get Involved page of [the MOOS website](#) for many of the resources we have created and curated to enable local action. As a result of this work, we hope it will be much easier for students, staff, and faculty to plug into sustainability networks here at McGill.

Sub-deliverable. Support the development and adoption of 3+ sub-institutional action plans: **cancelled.**

We decided to cancel this stream of work for two reasons. First, significant delays in finalizing the Sustainability Strategy forced us to focus on our primary objective. Second, we learned that some of the building blocks necessary to develop sub-institutional plans (e.g., with units or faculties) were not yet in place. With this in mind, we instead focused on developing the basic educational resources required to kick-start conversations about sustainability (see sub-deliverable above).

Sub-deliverable. Develop a proposal for a Sustainability Tracking System and ensure that indicators are adopted by oversight bodies: **in progress.**

The development of a new monitoring & reporting framework for sustainability at McGill is underway. Over the past year, we completed research on best practices in 1) sustainability monitoring, and 2) sustainability reporting at peer universities and in the corporate sector. We used this research to complete a proposal for a new framework for monitoring and reporting at McGill. At this point in time, the McGill Office of Sustainability is moving toward implementing this proposal. A network of stakeholders will be consulted to help select key performance indicators for sustainability in summer 2014.

Action #12 of the Sustainability Strategy calls for the explicit development of a sustainability tracking system, and our work lays the groundwork needed to accomplish this action.

A Few Lessons Learned

- 1. How to address the scope of sustainability:** Because the Vision 2020 has intentionally upheld a broad and inclusive definition of sustainability, the scope of the original 51 actions was very far-reaching. However, while composting and energy efficiency are easily recognized by a general population as topics in sustainability (the term coined by Principal Fortier for these kinds of initiatives was “sustainability 1.0”), issues like accessible gathering places, French language acquisition and the regular publication of [Failure Reports](#) are not always understood as such (these issues, in the Principal’s words, would represent “sustainability 4.0”). While the [Vision and Goals](#) for sustainability we put forward were appropriately holistic, the actions that followed needed to communicate and carry forward present-day understandings of sustainability at an accessible pace. Using the Principal’s 1.0-4.0 model, we focused on those actions that could be described as sustainability 1.0, 2.0, and occasionally 3.0. Over the years we hope to see the advancement of existing actions and the emergence of new actions that model increasingly nuanced and holistic understandings of sustainability.
- 2. How to write a Strategy:** The feedback we received from the senior administration team helped us to understand a few key characteristics of successful strategies: brevity, focus, and concreteness. We concentrated on those actions that had existing traction, could be traced back to designated units and partners, and could clearly be advanced *one step further* than their current state in the coming years. A two year timeframe also built in a shorter iteration time, ensuring that the Strategy will stay relevant and responsive to changes as we go.
- 3. How to recognize the preconditions for Hubs:** Since wrapping up our Hub experiment, we’ve learned that we were missing two key preconditions for the establishment of social innovation hubs:
 - Resources:* experts such as Zaid Hassan from Reos Partners estimate that the time required to set up a single one hub can be longer than 6 months. Recognizing that we were trying to establish five, we now see that our initial objective was overly ambitious.
 - Adequate scoping:* our hubs were missing a clear sense of purpose that would have better enabled them to gel as a group from the beginning. Clarifying this purpose and a concrete project to address together early in the process will be important for all those seeking to establish sustainability hubs going forward.
- 4. Reporting on failures and lessons learned is powerful:** For more lessons learned during the entire Vision 2020 process, please see the [Vision 2020 Impact Report](#) and its more provocative companion, [the Vision 2020 Failure Report](#). The Failure Report, in particular, has proven to be a powerful learning tool. Its hard-won insights have remained relevant throughout this complex process of change-making, and we’ve referred back to it countless times to remind ourselves of what we’ve learned so far. What’s more, we’ve found the Failure Report to be a strong connective and communicative force within and beyond McGill. Notably, almost every high-level sustainability professional who visited McGill for the Net Positive lecture series brought it up in conversation as an excellent report. Its honesty, transparency, and emphasis on learning modeled the sustainable practices we were promoting in the Strategy, and increased the accessibility and meaningfulness of Vision 2020 as a whole.

Thank you

At the official close of Vision 2020 we feel that things are really just beginning. That we’re able to wrap up this ambitious project with a sense of growing positivity and empowerment in the sustainability community at McGill is testament to the major impact of the Sustainability Projects Fund here at the university. We are grateful for the confidence that the SPF working group showed in the Vision 2020 project from the beginning, and for the opportunity this presented to so many of us – to experiment with, learn from, communicate and champion the exciting process of social change-making here at McGill. With your help, Vision 2020 was a major milestone in the evolution of sustainability at McGill. *Thank you.*

TABLE 1. SUMMARY OF DELIVERABLES FOR VISION 2020: MOVING BEYOND THE PLAN

KEY TO SUCCESS	DELIVERABLES	STATUS	COMMENTS
OVERSIGHT	Sustainability Oversight Body.	In progress.	A proposal was submitted to the Office of the Principal in March, 2014. Follow-up efforts are underway. This action is included in the Sustainability Strategy (Action #14).
	Sustainability Hubs: Research, Education, Connectivity, Operations, Administration & Governance.	First steps complete.	We experimented with hubs by hosting five preliminary hub meetings. For more, see our blog .
	Final Action Plan & Sustainability Strategy.	Complete.	The Sustainability Strategy and Priority Action Briefs are complete.
PARTNER ENGAGEMENT	Online platform to register public commitments and to plug actions and projects into a living process.	Cancelled.	Given the need to revise the Sustainability Strategy, the creation of online platforms exceeded team capacity.
	Costing Plan for Senior Administration	Cancelled.	Deemed unnecessary by senior partners.
COMMUNITY-WIDE ACTIONS	Many projects that align with the Sustainability Strategy launched.	Complete.	14 priority actions from the Sustainability Strategy are being implemented by a network of partners in 2014-2016.
	Resources to enable sub-institutional sustainability action planning.	In progress.	Please see the Get Involved page of the MOOS website for many of the resources we have created and curated to enable local action.
	3+ sub-institutional sustainability action plans adopted.	Cancelled.	Given workload associated with completion of the Sustainability Strategy, and the necessity to develop basic educational resources (e.g., Get Involved website), we decided that this deliverable was premature.
MONITORING AND MEASUREMENT	A proposal for a Sustainability Tracking System and indicators adopted by oversight bodies ²	In progress.	The development of a new monitoring & reporting framework for sustainability at McGill is underway. Action #12 of the Sustainability Strategy calls for the explicit development of a tracking system. We have prepared an implementation proposal, which will be carried out over 2014-2016.
COMMUNICATIONS AND REPORTING	Newsletters and multi-media progress updates (monthly)	Complete.	In addition to periodic Sustainability at McGill newsletters, we frequently updated the Vision 2020 blog .
	Media Releases (for Online Platform, Strategy, Oversight Body	Complete.	Please see the SPF impact

² We currently use AASHE's Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating (STARS) System, which is largely based on reporting initiatives and programs. Our tracking system will be based on core indicators for sustainability across the five categories.

and Hubs)

metrics for a summary of communications stats.

A media launch for the Sustainability Strategy has been planned for Fall 2014.

1-year report on website and presented to governing bodies.

Complete.

This final report on Vision 2020: Moving Beyond the Plan has been submitted to the SPF to fulfill this deliverable.