



# NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY **SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGY**



2017-2022



## Mission Statement

"As a public comprehensive university located in a major metropolitan area, Northern Kentucky University delivers innovative, student-centered education and engages in impactful scholarly and creative endeavors, all of which empower our graduates to have fulfilling careers and meaningful lives, while contributing to the economic, civic, and social vitality of the region."

## Our Core Values:

We will promote a culture that fosters and celebrates **EXCELLENCE** in all that we do. We will engage in honest, fair, and ethical behavior with **INTEGRITY** at the heart of every decision and action. Ours will be a community that embraces **INCLUSIVENESS**, diversity, and global awareness in all dimensions of our work. We will approach our work – how we teach, engage, and serve – with creativity and **INNOVATION**. And we will maintain a climate of **COLLEGIALITY** built on respect and characterized by open communication and shared responsibility.

## Our Promise:

We promise to put our students first.  
We promise to lead with excellence.  
We promise to make a lasting impact.



## Our Foundation

At Northern Kentucky University, we promise to put students first, to lead with excellence, and to make a lasting impact. With these promises comes the profound responsibility to lead by example as we prepare our students with the knowledge and foresight to be future leaders who will safeguard our natural environment.

**"We owe it to ourselves and to the next generation to conserve the environment so that we can bequeath our children a sustainable world that benefits all."**

**-Wangari Maathai**

We recognize the value of our natural environment and have made ambitious efforts to secure a more sustainable future. Since 2007, among other sustainability initiatives, we have completed five comprehensive inventories of the University's greenhouse gas emissions, opened three LEED-certified buildings, and created a clearinghouse for sustainability activities on campus called NKU Sustainability.

In 2013, we engaged the campus community in the extensive process of drafting a strategic plan. Hundreds of stakeholders collaborated to create a 2018 vision in which "increase environmental sustainability efforts across the campus" was an action step set forth to achieve the goal of institutional excellence.

With this strategic vision as our catalyst, we take this next step toward envisioning and enabling a more sustainable NKU. The 2017 Sustainability Strategy is a five-year guiding document for building and enhancing the sustainability of our campus community. This Strategy is a necessary step in the University's journey towards a more socially, economically, and ecologically sustainable future.



## What is sustainability?

In 1987, a subcommittee of the United Nations known as the Brundtland Commission published a report which defined sustainable development as the ability to "meet the needs of the current generation without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition catapulted the term "sustainability" into public discourse about environmental issues; however, it has been both praised and criticized for its simplicity.

The Brundtland Report's definition of sustainable development, though widely accepted, does not capture the depth and breadth of sustainability or its impact on local or global populations, economies, and ecosystems.

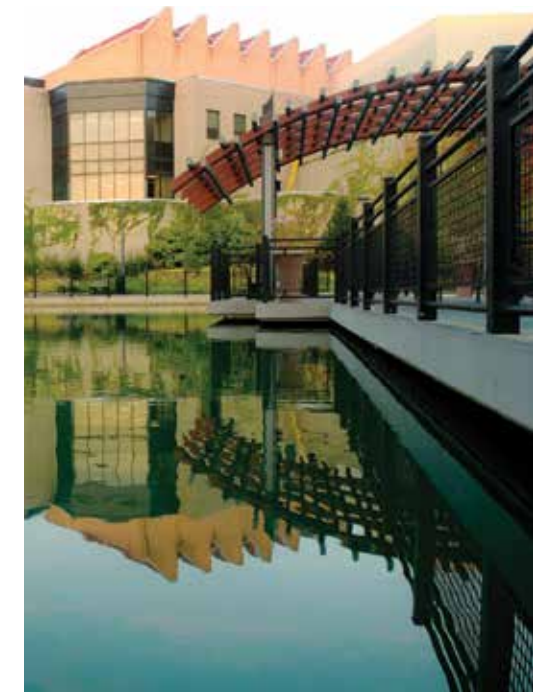
## Sustainability at NKU

Not long after NKU was founded, a passion for environmental issues could be found on campus. In the late 1970s, a group of faculty and staff formed an Environmental Impact Committee through which they advocated for the preservation of natural areas on campus. To this day, students, faculty, and staff continue to demonstrate their passion for making NKU a leader in sustainability through various outlets.

In 2007, NKU became a signatory of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (now known as the Second Nature Climate Leadership Commitment) and in doing so, the University committed to net zero carbon emissions by 2050. Subsequently, the University created a Climate Action Plan which was published in 2010 and provided a detailed overview of the University's carbon footprint.

In preparation for our current Strategic Plan (2013-18), a subcommittee of the Strategic Planning Committee understood the need for a comprehensive definition of sustainability as it applies specifically to our institution.

That subcommittee defined sustainability as: "the practice of shared stewardship of resources, both natural and man-made, to create and maintain healthful, equitable, livable, and fiscally responsible communities



**"The first rule of sustainability is to align with natural forces, or at least not try to defy them."**

**-Paul Hawken**

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**Each member of our campus community has a role to play in the University's efforts to build and operate an institution that advocates for the vitality of our community and planet.**

both locally and globally. Environmental sustainability is the responsibility of all members of the campus community and is fundamental to the University's mission of education, scholarship, and engagement."

Each member of our campus community has a role to play in the University's efforts to build and operate an institution that advocates for the vitality of our community and planet. This Sustainability Strategy is intended to act as a roadmap to unify and guide campus sustainability efforts to 2022.

## Our Strategy

The NKU Sustainability Strategy is grounded in the framework established by the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education's (AASHE) Sustainability Tracking and Rating System (STARS). The four pillars of STARS include: academics, engagement, operations, and planning & administration. The STARS framework was used to guide the drafting process of the Sustainability Strategy with the intention of utilizing the benchmarking tool in the future as a means for measuring our sustainability progress alongside other institutions of higher education.



Drafting the Sustainability Strategy formally began in September 2016 with a public forum. The public forum was used to generate guiding themes and was followed by four work group meetings, one for each pillar of the STARS framework. The work group meetings were structured around the ideas and recommendations gathered at the public forum and were used to solidify goals and objectives. Comprised of faculty, staff, students, and community members, the work group was instrumental in formulating ideas, providing feedback, and vetting drafts of the document.



Ultimately, six goals were identified based on the ideas and recommendations from dozens of campus community members. Each goal, which is defined as a long-range intended outcome, is accompanied by at least one objective, which outlines a potential strategy for achieving each of the overall goals.

The NKU Sustainability Strategy is intended to be a living document. As we advance to 2050 and beyond, the University will grow, technologies will advance, and the environment will change. Thus our strategies will continue to evolve. In an effort to remain transparent and reflect the needs and strengths of the institution, we expect to formally review and update the Sustainability Strategy every five years.

**1976**

Northern Kentucky State College is granted university status, thereby becoming Northern Kentucky University

**Late 1970**

Environmental Impact Committee formed to advocate for the preservation of natural greenspaces on the campus grounds

NKU begins to informally collect recyclables such as cardboard and paper

**Mid 1990**

The Animals, Plants, and Earth Society, a student organization now known as the Environmentally Concerned Organization of Students (ECOS), is founded

**1996**

NKU performs a campus-wide lighting retrofit project to reduce energy consumption and cost

**2003**

First official NKU Earth Day celebrations

**2004**

NKU enters into Energy Savings Performance Contract

Students lobby for a formal recycling program and NKU begins to collect glass, plastic, books, and other recyclable items

**2007**

NKU enters into an agreement with TANK, thereby allowing anyone with an NKU ID to access local bus routes for free

NKU becomes a signatory of the American College and University's Presidents' Climate Commitment and, in doing so, commits to emitting net zero carbon emissions by 2050

**2008**

NKU is the first university to be recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree Campus USA

**2009**

The Commonwealth of Kentucky adopts administrative regulations for high performance building standards

NKU student volunteers complete the University's first greenhouse gas emissions inventory

**2010**

The President's Climate Commitment Task Force publishes the NKU Climate Action Plan

**2015**

The Office of Energy Management is created and the University's first full-time sustainability practitioner is hired

**2016**

Drafting of the 2017 Sustainability Strategy begins



## GOALS

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Increase participation in, and access to, initiatives that promote social and ecological vitality

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Expand external partnerships that inform NKU sustainability efforts and strengthen our regional impact



## Demonstrate responsible stewardship of natural resources



NKU is part of a larger, interconnected community of environments, cultures, and economies. As a regional powerhouse, we must lead by example and preserve the stability and longevity of our resources. Many of the objectives that accompany this goal are a response to our commitment to carbon neutrality by 2050 and are intended to catalyze our 2018 strategic vision of excellence in securing and managing resources sustainably.

Success will be measured by tracking landfilled waste, campus utility usage, the composition of the campus commuting profile, the establishment of a campus tree canopy inventory, and rainwater retention projects.

### 2014 Baseline



40,965,816 kWh  
of purchased electricity consumed



464 Tons  
of solid waste sent to landfill



301,695 TANK bus rides

## OBJECTIVES

- Reduce the need for single occupancy vehicles on campus by increasing participation in alternative transportation and ridesharing options
- Reduce waste sent to landfills by addressing institutional purchasing and management of solid and organic waste
- Reduce consumption of purchased electricity by exploring viable renewable energy options and increasing energy efficiency of campus operations
- Increase efforts to sequester emissions on campus by expanding the campus tree canopy
- Manage stormwater runoff by implementing rainwater retention projects and best management practices



## OBJECTIVES

- Identify, track, and expand sustainability literacy of the campus community
- Integrate sustainability into new student and employee orientations
- Encourage student engagement in sustainability-focused, on-campus organizations
- Create a Sustainability Advisory Committee comprised of a diverse group of faculty, staff, and students with a mission to create a culture of sustainability and update and track the progress of the Sustainability Strategy

## Empower the campus community to enhance the University's culture of sustainability



Together, our students, faculty, and staff have the ability to affect positive and lasting change by engaging each other in sustainability concepts. By first understanding our campus community's knowledge of sustainability, we will empower our people to cultivate a culture of sustainability through peer-to-peer engagement. We will facilitate this engagement by creating a Sustainability Advisory Committee as a means for the campus community to regularly participate in and drive the progress of sustainability on campus.

Success will be measured by student participation in peer-to-peer sustainability educational activities, the activity of the Sustainability Advisory Committee, a sustainability literacy assessment, and participation in sustainability-related orientation activities.



### Campus Recycling Program

The Environmentally Concerned Organization of Students (ECOS) was the driving force that brought a formal recycling program to campus in the early 2000s.





## Increase and strengthen sustainability education



With a history of student-centered educational excellence, NKU is poised to provide a campus environment that sparks idea sharing and curiosity, which can lead to powerful and effective solutions to environmental, social, and economic problems. In an effort to further sustainability learning and research activities, we will embed opportunities throughout the campus grounds and in classrooms that allow for the continuous development of sustainability knowledge.

Success will be measured by an inventory of course offerings that provide sustainability-related content, the number of students and faculty engaged in sustainability-related research activities, and the number of faculty and staff participants in sustainability-related professional development opportunities.

### OBJECTIVES

- Increase sustainability-related content of new and existing course offerings by incentivizing faculty participation in curriculum development workshops
- When possible, incorporate living-learning elements into new building designs that enable in-depth sustainability learning activities



### Environmental Science Programs

Undergraduate students can earn a B.S. in Environmental Science with a STEM-discipline minor, a B.A. in Environmental Science with a focus on:

- 1) Nature, Culture, Social Justice,
- 2) Urban Sustainability,
- 3) Environmental Communication,
- 4) Health, Community, Environment, or minor in Environmental Studies.

These programs focus on the study of environmental problems and solutions, while preparing students for a wide range of professions.



**56**  
Total student enrollment in the Environmental Science Program (50 majors and 6 minors)

**2014 Baseline**



### OBJECTIVES

- Develop a financial model that enables the creation of projects that further the University's goal of carbon neutrality
- Assess endowment investments in sustainability and recommend strategies for increasing investment in sustainable entities and decreasing investment in fossil fuels

## Invest in sustainability



Sustainability embodies the balance of a healthy population, a flourishing environment, and a thriving economy. The ripple effects of our institution-wide decisions can be felt even beyond our region, thus strategically investing in sustainability can have a lasting impact on the campus and beyond. We will work to assess our institution's current investments in sustainability and develop a funding model for large and small campus projects that improve the sustainability of campus operations.

Success will be measured by tracking institutional investments and the establishment of a funding model for sustainability-focused projects.



### \$415,000 Lighting Retrofit Project

In 1996, lamps and ballasts across campus were upgraded in an effort to reduce electricity consumption and energy costs.



### \$4.5M Energy Saving Performance Contract

The 12-year project included energy and water-saving upgrades to campus infrastructure.



**NKU is poised to provide a campus environment that sparks idea sharing and curiosity, which can lead to powerful and effective solutions.**





## Increase participation in, and access to, initiatives that promote social and ecological vitality



The vitality of our University depends on the well-being of our people and preservation of our natural environment.

We will support initiatives that promote the sustained health of our community members, and we will work to protect and enhance the greenspaces that we manage in order to promote healthy human-environmental interactions throughout campus.

Success will be measured by tracking greenspace preservation efforts and wellness initiatives that support healthy and active lifestyles of our campus community members.



### Community Gardens

NKU and the surrounding region are home to three gardens. Management of the gardens is a collaborative effort among the University and community members. Each garden is maintained by a team of volunteers.

## OBJECTIVES

- Partner with NKU Wellness to support initiatives that foster sustained health of the campus community such as the Tobacco-Free Policy
- Preserve and expand greenspaces and areas that promote activity, leisure, and learning within the University's outdoor environment

## Expand external partnerships that inform NKU sustainability efforts and strengthen our regional impact



Collaborations and partnerships that extend into our community are just as important as those that exist within our campus boundaries. One component of a much larger and interconnected social, economic, and environmental network, we will nurture existing partnerships and create new collaborative opportunities that inform and enrich our sustainability efforts.

Success will be measured by multi-year, campus-community partnerships that advance sustainability.



## OBJECTIVES

- Establish ongoing partnerships with regional universities, K-12 schools, or external organizations that advance regional sustainability



### Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project

NKU collaborated with the Manuel D. and Rhoda Mayerson Foundation in 1999 to design an initiative that teaches students about nonprofits and philanthropy through a hands-on learning approach. Each semester, 15 to 20 university courses are awarded funds, and the classes must select local nonprofits in which to invest. Since inception, the Mayerson Student Philanthropy Project has facilitated the investment of over \$1.5 million in local nonprofits. Environmental stewardship is one cause the classes have supported year after year. Funding examples include: construction of a garden in a local community where access to fresh produce was inadequate, "adopt-a-stream" project, and summer environmental camps for kids. Classes are financed with donations from community foundations, businesses, and individuals.

# Thank you

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