

Notes from October 11 Sustainability Centres Knowledge Exchange – Breakout Group Discussions

Group #1: Setting up a Center

Group members: Alice Mascena Barbosa, Tracey Mariner, Ekpen Owie, Farley Nobre, and Marie Boudreau

Discussion notes:

- What are core pillars of Centers?
 - The core pillars are education, research, and engagement.
 - **Education** - Determine what certificates, courses, incentives, and programs are offered in your college/university that deal with your niche/area of sustainability and work with those persons to help create awareness.
 - **Research** - Determine what faculty, administrators, staff, and community workers are working on sustainability research and develop a research affiliate group made up of these persons.
 - **Engagement** - Work with industry leaders who have a vested interest around sustainability to get buy-in.
- What is a definition of a sustainability center?
 - In order to establish a Center, it should be niche/topic specific and have a clear focus. Be sure to align your center function and purpose so they both are clear.
- How to lead a Center? Most center are changing the model from faculty directors to getting an industry advisor/director because they bring with them industry connections to aid with funding.

Related links or examples

- NBS/ SCC guide: "[Starting a sustainability centre](#)"
- NBS/ SCC centre leader video: "[What I wish I knew before starting a sustainability centre](#)"
- Example of established Center given by <https://www.ualberta.ca/sustainability/index.html>

Group #2: Fundraising for Sustainability Centers

Group members: Federica Saluzzo, Avi Meyerhoff, Hao Lu, Elena Senatorova, Davide Luzzini, Ekpen Owie, Tracey Mariner, Divya Singhal

Discussion notes:

Strategies and lessons:

- Crowdfunding? Could be one way. Though centre representatives have not tried
- Donations- Alumni (as school we need to tap and make this connection stronger)

- Network - NBS can also help us connect better as we have complementary skills. Joining ERASMUS+ kind of opportunity; writing proposal together; NBS can help /facilitate such collaboration
- Governments - Respective govts can be a source /grants
- Research/Funding organisations - Joining with partners(different schools/centres) is beneficial while applying for funding.
- Credibility is a key aspect
- Endowments - stable way
- Advisory board - for strategic direction
- Partners of the centres from corporate provide fee for two -three years
- Proper structure- Centre has various members (largely faculty driving but having a full time person)

Related links or examples

- NBS/ SCC article: "[Sustainability Centres Webinar: Finding Centre Funding](#)"
- https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/funding/?order=-last_published_at (For British Academy Open grant opportunity)

Group #3: Building Administrative Support for Impact

Group members: Julian Bomelburg, University of St. Gallen; Maya Fischhoff, NBS; Amy Colbert, University of Iowa

Discussion notes:

1. Consider framing. Align with other administrative priorities (e.g., entrepreneurship; sustainability is an opportunity for economic development). More useful than just saying "sustainability is important."
2. Administration pays attention to powerful stakeholders
 - Cultivate interested (wealthy) alums
 - Align with student interests; leverage student pressure
 - Businesses are asking for sustainability skills; another leverage point
 - (Maybe sustainability is a trending/ hot topic?)
3. What if there's leadership turnover? Connect to new leaders, e.g. thru one-to-one meetings
4. Other strategic tips:
 - Can be grassroots change (e.g., a passionate sustainability group can build coalitions and create change from the bottom up)
 - Accomplish small wins and support may follow
 - Wait it out – the time for change will come

Related links or examples

- NBS/ SCC article: "[How to Run a Sustainability Centre](#)" (2023) has a section on winning over Deans.
- [Research](#) on ways that sustainability centres align with broader business school interests
- NBS/ SCC article: "[How to Manage a Sustainability Centre](#)" (2016). More advice from centre leaders on allies (echoing the conversation in this breakout!)

Group #4: Interdisciplinary Challenges

Group members: Toloue Miandar, Bobbi Dunham, Jennifer Goodman, Amy Colbert, Maya Fischhoff

Discussion notes:

“Lots of questions, few solutions.”

People are interested in ties across/ within business school – across departments. Also potentially “trans-disciplinary” – projects with practitioner partners.

It’s hard! Challenge of conducting research together coming from different disciplines, having different publication targets and relevant journals. Additional pressures: Politics, departmental concerns about retention and enrollment. Additional challenge: Can be hard to get volunteers to facilitate – everyone is busy.

What if... We could move beyond silos and structures. Even have “a little house off campus where people could meet and connect” around interdisciplinarity.

A successful approach = problem- based. Amy describes a group gathering to work on 15-minute cities.

Related links or examples

- NBS/ SCC video/ article: [Building Interdisciplinarity in Sustainability Education and Research](#) from the 2021 SCC Workshop, provides definitions of interdisciplinarity and reviews the rationale, challenges, and effective strategies.

Group topic: Strategy

Group members: Monica Touesnard and Matthew Lynch

Discussion notes:

Our discussion focused on aspects of strategic planning for Centres as a key tool for defining the impact a Centre wants to have, and the key levers it has to have impact.

We drew on the recent experience of the Ivey Centre for Building Sustainable Value and its strategy development, that happened in parallel to the School’s overall strategy process. This created alignment on the strategic importance of sustainability and opened a mandate for pursuing ambitious impact (references below). It is early days for this model but it seems to be gaining traction with key stakeholders.

Some key questions arose from this discussion, which will be relevant to other Centres (and possibly topics for future sessions):

- How should a Centre pursue the development of its own strategic plan? (particularly where there is no overall School strategy to align with)?
- What are the key elements of a strategy for a business school sustainability centre? How can this help advance an impact agenda?
- What is the role of the Advisory Board in guiding and supporting this process?

Related links or examples

- Ivey Centre for Building Sustainable Value Strategy: [LINK](#) and Ivey School Strategy: [LINK](#)
- NBS/SCC: “[Measure Your Centre’s Impact](#)” – guidance on developing a logic model/ theory of change
- NBS/SCC: “[Brand Your Sustainability Centre](#)” – guidance from communications experts