

Case Study: Embedding Sustainability and Climate Action Framework at Simon Fraser University

Program Description/Overview

The SFU community, along with our external community and global partners, continues to deepen our commitment and leverage collective impact to further each of the [UN Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#), with *SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities* and *SDG 13: Climate Action* as areas of focus. Building on the progress achieved under SFU's [Strategic Sustainability and Climate Action Plan](#), SFU recently released our 2030 Resilience, Sustainability and Climate Strategy. This next phase emphasizes amplifying impact through collaboration, strategic engagement, and coordinated action. The central SFU Sustainability and Climate Office plays the role of institutional facilitator and convener, to advance institution-wide synergies and to build strong relationships and community-centered approaches through the lens of SFU's Embedding Sustainability and Climate Action (ESCA) framework.

The ESCA framework is built on research and practice by Dr. Stephanie Bertels at the Beedie School of Business. It is designed to embed and integrate practices throughout the institution which reflect the UN SDGs, equitable climate action, and low carbon resilience. The framework leverages SFU's institutional strengths and invites all students, staff and faculty (and their external partners) to meet our shared goals collaboratively in their roles as leaders, learners, teachers, researchers, and practitioners.

The ESCA framework drives innovation and creativity while facilitating the development, implementation, evaluation and communication of SFU's strategic sustainability and climate action plans in collaboration with each VP portfolio. The framework embeds meaningful action across SFU's core business areas, including teaching, research, community and global engagement, and operations. Through ESCA, sustainability and climate action becomes the work of all SFU community members. The framework seeks to build accountability into the

formal structures of the university including planning, policy, processes, human resource allocation, and more.

Organization and Implementation

Accountability and responsibility are distributed across the Executive team, across all SFU's work locally and globally, and across all campuses. SFU's Sustainability and Climate Office facilitates this institution-wide approach and weaves together the many strands of SFU's planning and implementation work.

- **The Central SFU Sustainability and Climate Office** acts as the central coordinating hub for all sustainability and climate action work at SFU. Its role is to facilitate and support the community's efforts and respond as needs change over time.
- **The Executive Team** (President, Provost, and Vice-Presidents) set the foundation for ESCA's success and model the action required for scaling up SFU's leadership. They prioritize sustainability and climate action as key institutional priorities and set sustainability and climate action goals as part of the annual goal setting process.
- **The ESCA Leads** are assigned to lead the sustainability and climate action work within their respective portfolios and have a direct connection with the Provost/Vice-President. To ensure plans and activities are resourced, implemented and aligned to other strategic goals, such as priorities within SFU's institutional strategic plan [What's Next: The SFU Strategy](#), the Provost and each VP assign senior leaders as leads to act as liaisons between their portfolio and the SFU Sustainability and Climate Office.
- **Vice-President Senior Leadership Teams** lead the teams, departments, or Faculties that will carry out a great deal of the work in the ESCA implementation plans. Their role is to contribute to implementation planning, resourcing, implementation, progress measurement, and communicating barriers and opportunities.
- **Communicators** are designated by portfolio to provide consistent and regular communications on the ESCA approach and on current work and progress.

ESCA continuously evolves to connect SFU's sustainability and climate action work to [SFU's priorities and commitments related to EDI and Truth and Reconciliation](#). Applying equity-design, partnering with the Equity Office, and providing training in decolonizing practices make up a substantial part of the ethos of ESCA.

Outcomes and Impact

From 2020-2025, sustainability and climate-related initiatives, championed by faculty, staff, and students under the 2025 Strategic Sustainability and Climate Action Plan, grew from 18 to over 150. A selection of highlights have been included below and additional details can be found within the [2020-2025 Sustainability and Climate Action Final Report](#).

- SFU's [Climate Innovation](#) team has been established. More than 100 SFU researchers and 100 external partners have been engaged through climate innovation workshops and funding opportunities.
- Founded in 2022, [SFU's Civic](#) Innovation Lab (CIL) works to advance education through the provision of collaborative learning and research opportunities and contribute to the economic, social, and environmental well-being of Burnaby residents through the study of civic innovation challenges. In 2025, CIL supported 14 ongoing projects and over \$31M in research value.
- In April 2024, the [inaugural Equity Forum](#) explored the intersections of equity and planetary health. Co-led by Dr. Gilpin-Jackson and Dr. Dugan O'Neil (VP Research and Innovation), the event welcomed over 70 participants and featured a Collective Story Harvesting process. SFU storytellers working at the intersection of equity and planetary health shared their experiences, sparking meaningful dialogue, reflection, and encouraging deeper learning.
- SFU is on track to meet our [UN Race to Zero](#) goals. Success on reductions of SFU's direct emissions (Scopes 1 and 2) was bolstered with the development of the [Corix Biomass Plant](#). The high-efficiency heating plant converts biomass into energy and uses recycled urban and construction wood waste as its primary fuel. The GHG emissions saved are equivalent to the emissions from 900 homes every year.

- Renewable energy sources on SFU's Burnaby campus have increased to approximately 95% as of July 2024 due to ongoing system optimization and the partnership with Corix—far exceeding the original 50% goal.
- SFU offers [563 courses across nine faculties](#) that address sustainability and the SDGs.

References

ESCA overview:

<https://www.sfu.ca/sustainability/about/our-approach.html>

Institutional progress on SDG 11: <https://www.sfu.ca/sustainability/commitments-initiatives/sustainable-development-goals/goals/goal-11.html>

Institutional progress on SDG 13:

<https://www.sfu.ca/sustainability/commitments-initiatives/sustainable-development-goals/goals/goal-13.html>

City of Burnaby Environmental Award in Business Stewardship:

https://www.sfu.ca/dashboard/faculty-staff/news/2025/07/sfu-s-sustainability-and-climate-action-leadership-earns-award.html?utm_source=linkedin&utm_medium=social&utm_content=9bd18c1e-9f16-4d62-9576-631d8db6db65