



YMCA GREEN NETWORK –
NORTH AMERICA

WORLD
YMCA

YMCA Sustainability Action Planning Toolkit

Green Practices to improve operational
efficiency and build a more sustainable future





Welcome to the Sustainability Action Planning Toolkit

Developed by YMCAs across North America, this toolkit is designed to help Ys build greener practices that improve operational efficiency, strengthen communities, and create a more sustainable future.

YMCAs are facing rising operating costs, aging facilities, increasing expectations from communities, and new opportunities related to sustainability, resilience, and funding. At the same time, young people and other stakeholders are asking organizations to take action for a healthier planet.

Whether your YMCA is just getting started or building on existing efforts, this toolkit provides practical tools, assessments, action ideas, and connections to a network of YMCA leaders who are learning and sharing together.

Sustainability is simply meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.*

* Adapted from **Our Common Future**: Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development

NEW TO
SUSTAINABILITY?
START HERE

#1

FORM A
GREEN TEAM

#2

COMPLETE THE
ASSESSMENT

#3

SELECT 3
PRIORITIES

#4

CREATE 3 GOALS

#5

BUILD YOUR
ACTION PLAN

#6

SHARE PROGRESS

IMPACT

for YMCAs and Communities

Throughout history, the YMCA has responded to the most pressing needs facing Today, one of those needs is building a healthy and sustainable future.

This is not new work for the YMCA. For more than a century, Ys have connected people with nature through camps and outdoor education, improved the efficiency of our facilities, and supported communities during emergencies and disasters.

Sustainability also creates opportunities to strengthen YMCA programs. From environmental education and Science, Technology, Engineering & Math (STEM) learning to workforce development and green careers, Ys can help prepare young people for the future while strengthening their communities today.

As stewards of thousands of facilities and acres of property, YMCAs can reduce costs, improve resilience, and create healthier spaces through more efficient buildings and operations.

The YMCA has long embraced a holistic approach to wellbeing. As environmental factors increasingly shape human health and community wellbeing, sustainability is a natural extension of that commitment: healthy spirit, mind, body, and planet for all.

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WHY SUSTAINABILITY MATTERS TO YMCAs

LOWER
OPERATING COSTS

MORE
RESILIENT FACILITIES

NEW
FUNDING OPPORTUNITIES

STRONGER
YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

HEALTHIER
COMMUNITIES

REDUCED
ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Global and North American YMCA Green Initiatives

Every day, Ys in 120 countries help people to reach their full potential and create a better future for themselves

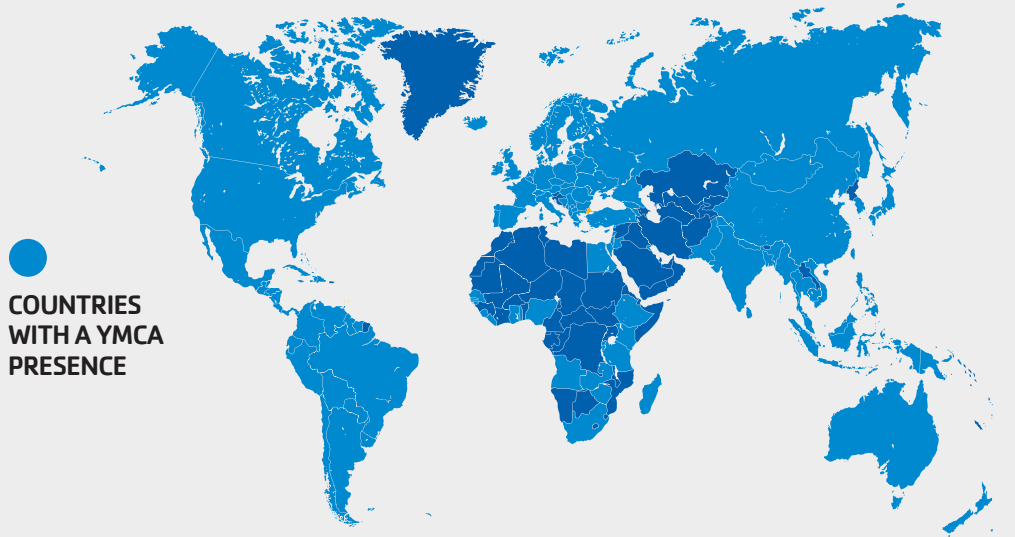
For more information, visit:
www.ymca.int/what-we-do/vision-2030/sustainable-planet/



Healthy Spirit, Mind,
Body...and Planet

FOR ALL

Building on the YMCA's historic commitment to holistic wellbeing, sustainability recognizes that healthy communities depend on healthy environments.



Making an Immediate Impact

The YMCA movement spans 120 countries and 12,000 local associations. Through YMCA Vision 2030, Ys around the world have committed to helping create a more sustainable future through the Sustainable Planet Pillar.

Across the globe, YMCAs are already taking action through:

- Environmental education and outdoor programs
- Community resilience and disaster preparedness efforts
- Energy efficiency and renewable energy projects
- Partnerships that support funding, learning, and innovation
- The Youth-Led Solutions Initiative, which supported 38 countries, reaching over 500,000 people and partnering with 100 organizations to address local environmental challenges since 2020.

Together, Ys are demonstrating that sustainability can strengthen communities while advancing our mission.

Collected by over
31 countries in the
first 3 years:



26K+

TREES PLANTED



3T+

COLLECTED WASTE



25K

PLASTIC BOTTLES RECYCLED



23K

POUNDS OF FOOD RESCUED

YMCA Green Ecosystem

Commitment

Vision, Strategy & Alignment
Define your YMCA's Green vision, goals and sustainability strategies. Develop a Green Action Plan

Engagement

Staff, Volunteers & Community Partners
Engage staff and volunteers at all levels and develop relationships and collaborations with community partners

Advancement

Financial & Technical Support
Mobilize financial and technical support to advance sustainability initiatives

YMCA Programs

Community Education & Events
Identify opportunities to build eco-friendly components into **existing** programs and partner to create new programs that align with your YMCA and community partners' goals

Property

Buildings, Sites & Transportation
Understand your YMCA's current infrastructure and emissions output and outline areas of opportunity to increase efficiency

Build Your Green Action Plan

The following pages will take you through a process of developing a YMCA Green Action Plan for your Y. It is recommended that you form a Green Action Team to complete the planning as a team and implement the initiatives your team develops.



Pro Tip

**Start Small.
Build Momentum.**

You do not need to do everything at once.

Many successful sustainability initiatives begin with small actions such as forming a YMCA Green Team, conducting an energy audit, reducing waste, or creating partnerships. Focus on progress, not perfection.



Who Should Be On A Green Team?

Suggested Green Team Members include:

- CEO or Executive Sponsor
- Facilities / Property Leader
- Program Leader
- Development / Advancement Representative
- Marketing / Communications Representative
- Board Volunteer
- Young Person (recommended)
- Community Partner (optional)



GETTING STARTED ON YOUR PATH TO A GREENER YMCA



Use the assessment below to determine your current state and what items you might want to include in your YMCA Green Action Plan.

Most action items are self/organization driven (low cost), meaning the items can be completed primarily with time and energy from staff and volunteers.

Some items may require additional resources (higher cost) such as consultants.



Actions

Current State

NS: Not Started
MP: Minimal Progress
LP: Limited Progress
SP: Significant Progress

Include in your Y's Green Action Plan

Y - Yes, definitely include in Plan
C - Consider including in Plan
D - Delay, do not include in Plan at this time

COMMITMENT

A. Leadership Commitment

Gain commitment to making sustainability a priority

B. Point Person

Appoint a person responsible for implementing your Green Action Plan. Recommend a current senior leader or dedicated role who is or becomes an active member of the YMCA Green Network

C. YMCA Green Goals

Develop goals with staff and board leadership
- See examples on Pages 10-12

D. YMCA Green Action Plan

Include the detailed actions and impacts across your Association to meet your Green Goals

E. Board Inclusion & Alignment

Identify committees to engage and establish a reporting cadence



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Y - Yes, definitely include in Plan
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COMMITMENT (Continued)

F. Strategic Plan

Include environmental sustainability initiatives and/or focus area(s) within your existing or renewed Strategic Plan

G. Green Practices, Procedures & Policies

Expand operational, facility and sourcing procedures to improve sustainability; develop a stand-alone guide or incorporate into standard operating procedures

H. Disclosures & Visibility

Disclose your green practices, procedures and policies in annual reports, on website and in facility and site signage

Current State

NS: Not Started
 MP: Minimal Progress
 LP: Limited Progress
 SP: Significant Progress

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Y - Yes, definitely include in Plan
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Actions

ENGAGEMENT

A. Green Team(s)

Form teams, including but not limited to staff, members, volunteers and/or youth leaders to lead implementation of your Green Action Plan

The leader of your Green Team is an active member of the YMCA Green Space

B. Community Stakeholder Analysis

Conduct a stakeholder analysis to identify potential collaborators

C. Partnership

Develop a partnership engagement plan to support your goals

D. Staff Education & Awareness

Develop training, experiences and communications to educate staff on your Green Action Plan and how they can get involved

E. Member Education & Awareness

Develop programs, experiences and communications to educate members on your Green Action Plan and how they can get involved

F. YMCA Youth & Young People

Develop or partner on programs, experiences and events that engage young people



Actions

Current State

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PROGRAMS

A. YMCA Programming

Include environmental stewardship and outdoor education components in Y programs

B. Overnight Camp

Enhance programs to include environmental stewardship / outdoor education (e.g. Leave No Trace accreditation)

Participate in one or more national and/or global outdoor initiatives and programs

(e.g. National Parks Service-YMCA partnership, Youth-Led Solutions through Y-USA & the World Y, Bold & Gold program, YMCA Earth Service Corps)

C. STEM Programming

Enhance programs to include Green technology and science components

D. Creative Arts Programming

Add sustainability and eco-friendly topics and themes to arts programs

E. Green Jobs Awareness

Expand workforce development programming to include Green Jobs

F. Community Education

Provide disaster preparedness information and programming

Current State

NS: Not Started
 MP: Minimal Progress
 LP: Limited Progress
 SP: Significant Progress

Include in your Y's Green Action Plan

Y - Yes, definitely include in Plan
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Actions

PROPERTY

A. Property and Energy Audits

Perform detailed condition assessments of your major equipment and assets to understand remaining life, replacement costs, and to identify energy saving alternatives and new technology options, then build your list of actions

B. Energy Efficiency Actions

Build a list of electricity-saving activities (e.g. LED lighting, motion sensors for lighting, variable speed drives, efficient pumps/motors, eco-friendly fitness equipment etc.)



Actions

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PROPERTY (Continued)

C. Efficient Transportation Actions

Review green Fleet alternatives, develop Active Transportation supports (cycling, e-bikes) and EV charging

D. Waste Audit

Conduct audit and implement waste reduction and diversion actions

E. Water Audit

Develop plan to reduce water consumption as well as manage and protect natural water systems

F. Resilience Hub Audit

Develop plan to support local communities in major weather events and acute shocks

G. Biodiversity Audit

Develop plan to manage and protect local ecology, support local food systems, and expand spaces for native biodiversity

H. New Development Planning

Renew or develop facility and property guidelines to include green practices for new locations or major expansions



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ADVANCEMENT

A. Foundations & Government Supports

Review list of foundations & government programs that support sustainability initiatives and develop a plan to seek funding in each area

B. Advocacy

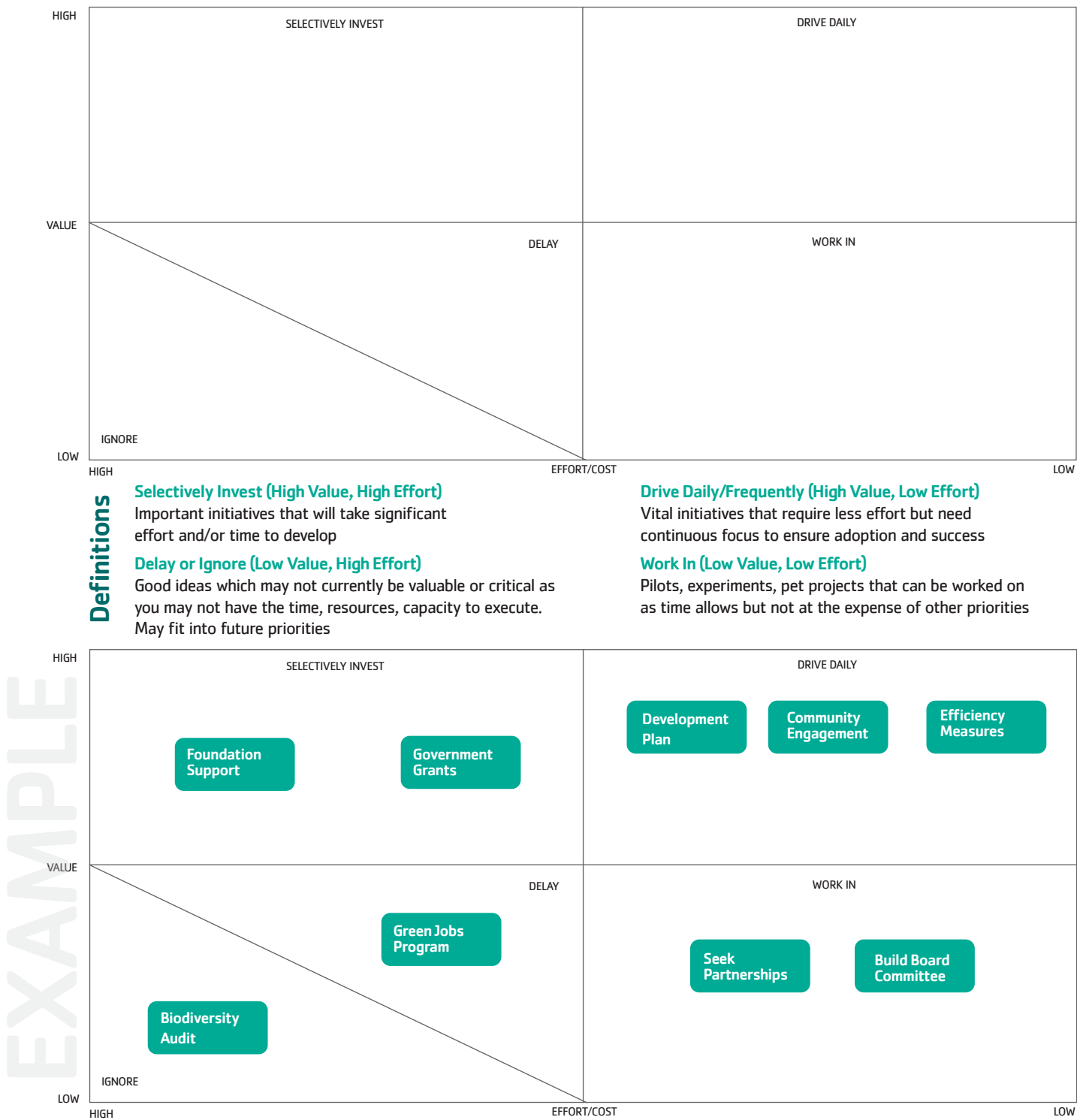
Promote and advocate for sustainability efforts within your organization and community

Add sustainability initiatives and support needed to materials at local and state/province levels

PRIORITIZATION MATRIX

YMCA Green Action Plan

Utilizing the Quick Assessment, identify areas that you want to focus on for your YMCA Green Action Plan and plot those initiatives in the Prioritization Matrix (adapted and used with permission from Stagen, LLC)



SAMPLE GOALS

The following pages provide an example set of goals with detailed action steps to choose from that fit your local context.

- » Improve Energy Efficiency & Reduce Emissions
- » Improve the Natural Environment
- » Reduce Water Consumption
- » Partner with the Community
- » Build a Culture of Sustainability



1: Improve Energy Efficiency & Reduce Emissions

- » Use less energy and save money while doing it
- » Focus on Scope 1 & 2 Emissions first, then extend deeper into Scope 3 Emissions if possible

Energy use in buildings—heating, cooling, lighting, and equipment—makes up a large share of an organization’s environmental impact. Other sources, such as transportation and waste, also affect the health of our communities and ecosystems

EXAMPLE GOALS FOR YOUR YMCA:

- Reduce our overall greenhouse gas emissions below baseline year by a determined percentage by 2050
- Reduce overall energy use below baseline year by a determined percentage by 2050
- Use high-efficiency fixtures, appliances and equipment in all renovations and future development
- Fund and implement energy-saving techniques and processes
- Promote the use of alternatives to travel, including public transportation, rideshares and teleconferencing
- Use renewable energy systems (e.g. PV, geothermal)
- Work with vendors to develop sustainable purchasing guidelines

Work together to develop energy-saving techniques and sustainable practices





2: Improve the Natural Environment

» Identify places for greenspace improvements

» Manage rural spaces with non-invasive biodiverse species

Reclaim and enhance natural spaces across the buildings and properties we own, lease, operate and visit in a way that promotes biodiversity and improved health of users

- Restore XX acres/hectares of natural biodiverse land
- Increase resilience and natural disaster preparedness through sustainable land stewardship practices and local partnerships
- Protect, restore and enhance local biodiversity by understanding and working with native species to improve the health of local environments

Minimizing the amount of waste sent to landfills is a top priority. Below are methods to reduce waste destined for the landfill.

- Divert waste by recycling, composting, and reducing single-use plastic
- Find out what recycling options are available in your municipality



REDUCE

REDUCE. REUSE. RECYCLE. These are the three preferred methods of waste minimization; however, when solid waste cannot be eliminated, make a commitment to careful management and disposal.



REUSE

- Divert waste by recycling, composting and reducing single-use plastic
- Find out what recycling options are available in your municipality
- Reduce the amount of waste sent to landfill below baseline year by a determined percentage by 2050



RECYCLE

- Reduce single-use plastic by providing reusable water containers or, if necessary, using recyclable containers (cans, paper, glass) instead of plastic water bottles for meetings and events
- Recycle paper, cardboard, glass, plastic and metal
- Dispose of electronic equipment and devices in an environmentally responsible manner, including computers, ink cartridges, cell phones and batteries
- Promote the reuse of furniture and other fixtures
- Properly recycle and/or dispose of hazardous materials



3: Reduce Water Consumption

» Operational changes to save water with some financial gain

» Education and promotion to users around water wastage

Our YMCAs affect water in many different ways through our indoor programming as well as our outdoor spaces in urban and rural locations. We can have impact on what we take and put back into our water systems as well as how we manage and protect them.

- Reduce water consumption year over year
- Encourage the use of reusable water containers and water coolers or tap water in our premises and add signage describing our commitment to reuse
- Improve our maintenance procedures to put less chemicals down the drains into our water systems
- Reduce exterior water use and irrigation through improved plantings, rain capture and scheduling



4: Partner with the Community

» An environmentally responsible organization does not come simply from a reduction of its environmental footprint

Connecting into our community is a cornerstone of our mission and provides endless opportunities to engage and expand our environmental impact.

- Use food that is local and healthy
- Offer volunteerism opportunities through green teams
- Offer education such as classes, signage and expanded programming for both guests and staff
- Support communities in weather-related emergencies and resilience opportunities
- Incorporate volunteerism into sustainability initiatives
- Build educational elements into activities and programs, including passive education such as signage
- Discover organizations in your community who are engaged in sustainability efforts
- Partner to build programs and collaborations



5: Build a Culture of Sustainability

» Empower all team members to become a part of the solution

Many Ys should start with culture change before undertaking capital projects.

- Establish Green Teams at all branches
- Train staff annually
- Include Sustainability in onboarding
- Add Sustainability goals to Strategic Plans
- Publish annual Progress Reports

YMCA Green Action Plan Template

Utilizing the information from your Green Assessment and Prioritization Matrix along with ideas from the sample goals and success metrics, write a draft of your YMCA Green Action Plan.

YMCA Name:

Date Completed:

Green Action Team Lead:

Executive Sponsor:

Board Committee:

Plan Period:

Our Green Vision (In one or two sentences - “What does a greener YMCA look like for our community?”)

Priority Areas (Check all that apply) ☐ Commitment ☐ Engagement ☐ Programs ☐ Property ☐ Advancement

Top Priorities in the Next 12-24 Months

Priority	Why It Matters

Goals and Action Steps

Goal	Actions	Lead	Timeline	Success Metric
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				

Measuring Success

The following are sample success measures:

- Energy use reduced (%)
 - Water use reduced (%)
 - Waste diverted from landfill (%)
 - Trees planted
 - Acres restored
- Youth engaged
 - Staff trained
 - Funding secured
 - Partnerships established
 - Operating dollars saved

YMCA Green Action Plan Template

Partnerships & Resources Needed

Partner / Resource	Purpose

Funding Opportunities

Opportunity	Status

Annual Progress Review

Measure	Baseline	Current	Goal
Energy Use			
Water Use			
Waste Diversion			
Community Partnerships			
Youth Engagement			
Funding Secured			
Operations Dollars Saved			

Commitments

We commit to advancing sustainability in ways that strengthen our mission, improve operations, and support healthier communities.

Executive Sponsor:	Date:
Board Representative:	Date:
Green Action Team Lead:	Date:

WE ARE PASSIONATE PEOPLE WHO SHARE A VISION

Empowering and supporting
YMCAs who are committed
to a sustainable future



YMCA Green Network – North America

Healthy Spirit, Mind, Body and Planet for All

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The YMCA Green Network – North America is made up of dedicated Y staff and partners who are committed to a sustainable future. Over more than three years, this group met monthly to share resources and develop a plan to empower and support Ys in their efforts to build green practices. This Toolkit is a result of their work.

I want to personally thank each YMCA Green Network member for your willingness to join a group with a very grassroots beginning, and also for your persistence to work through an array of possibilities as we landed on a simple framework toward a more sustainable future. Your continued support to share examples and develop resources for your colleagues is very much appreciated. A special thanks to Alex Versluis, Amy Wolf, Eleanor Blair, Sean Doles, Linda Parks, and Monet Love for authoring the toolkit and leading efforts to develop our sharing and networking site along with our partners, Gro and Technogym.

Every YMCA can contribute to a healthier future. Whether your next step is a simple operational improvement or a transformational community initiative, we invite you to join fellow YMCA leaders who are taking action to strengthen communities, improve operational sustainability, and care for our planet. Together, we can create Healthy Spirit, Mind, Body and Planet for All. Thank you all for your incredible leadership!

Kathy Kuras

Chair, YMCA Green Network – North America

NOTES

YMCA Green Network Strategy Team

Kathy Kuras, Chair

President & CEO
Greater Austin YMCA

Amy Wolf

Environmental Sustainability Director
YMCA of the Rockies

Alex Versluis, P. Eng., P.E., CEM*

Senior Vice President, Property Management
& Development
YMCA of Greater Toronto

Eleanor Blair

Vice President, Strategic Communications
& Connections
YMCA of Florida's First Coast

Samantha Apodaca

Grants Director
Greater Austin YMCA

Toolkit Design & Support

Linda Parks

Parks Group-Boulder

Sean Doles

Public Affairs Officer
Greater Austin YMCA

Monet Love

Senior Executive Assistant
Greater Austin YMCA

Global Strategies

Shakil Karim

Climate Advocacy Consultant
World YMCA

Thomas Valentine

Vice President, International Group
YMCA of the USA



* Special thanks to **Alex Versluis** for sharing information from his book **Giving Charities Green**, a great resource to start your journey.

www.givingcharitiesgreen.com



JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

Partner



Toolkit Contributors & Green Network Members

Courtney Aber

National BOLD & GOLD
Director
YMCA of Greater Seattle

Katie Adamson

Vice President, Health
Partnerships & Policy
YMCA of the USA

Chris Austill

Grant Manager
YMCA of Greater Boston

Renata Ferrari

Senior Director for Global
Advancement
YMCA of the USA

Tad Hatton

Chief Financial & Administrative
Officer
Greater Austin YMCA

Chad Nico Hiu

Senior Vice President, Strategy,
Equity & Impact
YMCA of San Francisco

Mish Hood

Executive Director
YMCA of Honolulu

Tammy Miller

Fmr. SVP, Risk Management
YMCA of Florida's First Coast

Niall Murton

Executive Director
YMCA of the North

Jay Nelson

Associate Director of Design
GRO Development

Tacing Parker

Fmr. Senior Executive Director
& Sustainability Pillar Lead
YMCA of San Francisco

Partner & Toolkit Sponsor



Kayla Payne

Specialist, Health Partnerships
& Policy
YMCA of the USA

Les Peters

Executive Director
Community Development YMCA
YMCA of Greater Long Beach

Sokthea Phay

Executive Director
Wang YMCA of Chinatown
YMCA of Greater Boston

Brian Rigby

Chief Operating Officer &
Director of Design
Gro Development

Sara Sedgwick

Director of Environmental
Education & Climate Justice
YMCA of San Francisco

Josh Sutton

Facilities Executive
YMCA of Greater Seattle

Nora Tafel

Fmr Sr. Mgr. Global Advancement
YMCA of the USA

Greg Waibel

Chief Operating Officer
YMCA of the USA
Fmr. CEO, YMCA of Honolulu

Julie Watkins

President & CEO
YMCA of the Rockies

Jonathan Wehri

Senior Design Director
GRO Development

Penny Zuber

Exec. Vice President, Chief
Operating Officer & CFO
YMCA of Florida's First Coast



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