

A to Z Guide to Sustainability for Local Government

Sustainability refers not just to “green” or “environmental” things it is the integration of social, environmental, economic and good governance considerations. However the overuse of the term sustainability has led to some confusion. This is why we have developed this A to Z guide glossary to help you define commonly used terms in the field of sustainability.

If you think we've missed a key term and would like to see it added to the A to Z guide please email sustainability@lgsa.org.au

Abatement is the amount by which a project reduces or captures greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

Active Transport form of transport other than a car.

Biodiversity refers to the variety of life forms. It is usually considered at three levels: genetic diversity, species diversity and ecosystem diversity.

Biofuel are fuels such as bioethanol or biodiesel made from plant or (less commonly) animal material and food waste.

Community Strategic Plan a ten strategy that identifies the community's main priorities and aspirations for the future, and addresses social, environmental, economic and civic leadership issues in an integrated manner.

Carbon offsets are incentives to promote an investment in an activity that reduces greenhouse gas emissions or removes them from the atmosphere.

Design for life is a design philosophy which incorporates consideration of the full life cycle of the product.

Ecologically Sustainable Development (ESD) is an approach that considers the needs of future generations whilst satisfying present day aspirations. It is part of councils charter in the NSW Local Government Act 1993 to promote ESD principles.

Food Miles is the distance travelled by food items from farm to plate and the amount of energy and greenhouse gas emissions embodied in that travel.

Good Governance refers to a standard of governance that meets all legal obligations whilst also respecting community values and aspirations (for example socially acceptable level of accountability, ethical conduct, transparency, participation and equal opportunity).

Global hectares (gha). Unit for measuring our demands on the Earth (ecological footprint) and the ability of the Earth to supply our demands (biocapacity). A global hectare is one hectare of land or water with world-average productivity.

Hybrid system which incorporates both active and passive elements.

Intergenerational Equity is one of the principles of ecologically sustainable development. This is the notion that the present generation should ensure that the health, diversity and productivity of the environment is maintained or enhanced for the benefit of future generations.

Jargon is the use of technical terms which if unexplained can cause communication barriers.

Knowledge is the data, information or understanding.

Life cycle assessment (LCA) a process used to evaluate the environmental burdens associated with a product, process, or activity by identifying energy and materials used and wastes released to the environment, and to evaluate and implement opportunities to affect environmental improvements.

Materials Recovery Facility (MRF) plant and equipment used to sort materials collected from the waste stream for recycling.

Melbourne Principles for Sustainable Cities a set of sustainability principles developed by the United Nations Environment Program.

Natural Resource Management (NRM) refers to the wide range of activities concerned with managing natural resources such as rivers, groundwater, soils, vegetation and fauna and so on.

Organisational Change a process of embedding and operationalising sustainability into everyday decision making.

Outcomes hierarchy a thinking tool that organises short and long term goals of a program.

Precautionary Principle is one of the principles of ecologically sustainable development. This is the notion that if there are threats of serious or irreversible damage, lack of full scientific certainty should not be used as a reason for postponing measures to prevent environmental degradation.

Quadruple Bottom Line (QBL) refers to the notion that organisations are responsible for social, environmental, economic and civic leadership outcomes. In some models the fourth element is described as “governance”.

Risk Management the process of identifying, analysing, evaluating, treating, monitoring and communicating risks in a way that minimises losses and maximises opportunities.

SAP stands for Sustainability Action Plan.

Social Justice principles to base Community Strategic Plan on, refer to the Earth Charter.

Sustainability stems from the phrase 'sustainable development', but has evolved to mean different things to different people. To some it relates to environmental concerns, to others it relates to the broader interplay of social, environmental, economic and governance factors. To avoid confusion, many councils and communities develop their own definitions to clarify what it means to them.

Sustainable development was defined by the United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development – the Brundtland Commission – in 1987 as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs."

Triple bottom line (TBL) refers to the notion that organisations are responsible for social and environmental as well as economic outcomes.

Urban heat island effect a dome of elevated temperatures caused by the heat absorbed by buildings and pavements in a city.

Urban Sustainability is about meeting the environmental needs of our local communities while encouraging current and future actions that aim for social, economic and environmental sustainability. This requires engagement of a wide range of stakeholders to build strong, effective partnerships to enable long term change. (NSW Environmental Trust)

Vision a statement of a future desired state.

WSUD stands for Water Sensitive Urban Design

WESAP stands for water energy savings action plan

Waste avoidance is preventing the generation of waste using practices such as resource conservation and source control

Xeriscaping is landscape design using natural drought tolerant species and water efficient management design

Year of...each year has a significant sustainability theme

You...sustainability begins with....

Zero waste is a philosophy that encourages the redesign of resource-use systems in such a way that waste is reduced to zero

References:

Holmes G, Buchhorn M, Wilson S, Donovan I (2008). The guide to good governance and ecologically sustainable development for local councillors. HCCREMS, NSW.

Sustainability Victoria Sustainability Glossary

<http://www.sustainability.vic.gov.au/www/html/1726-glossary-a-f.asp>

Glossary of Sustainability, Integrated Sustainability Analysis @ The University of Sydney

<http://www.isa.org.usyd.edu.au>

Glossary of ESD Terms Fawcett, Palich & Nervegna

<http://www.environmentdesignguide.net.au/media/NOT11.pdf>