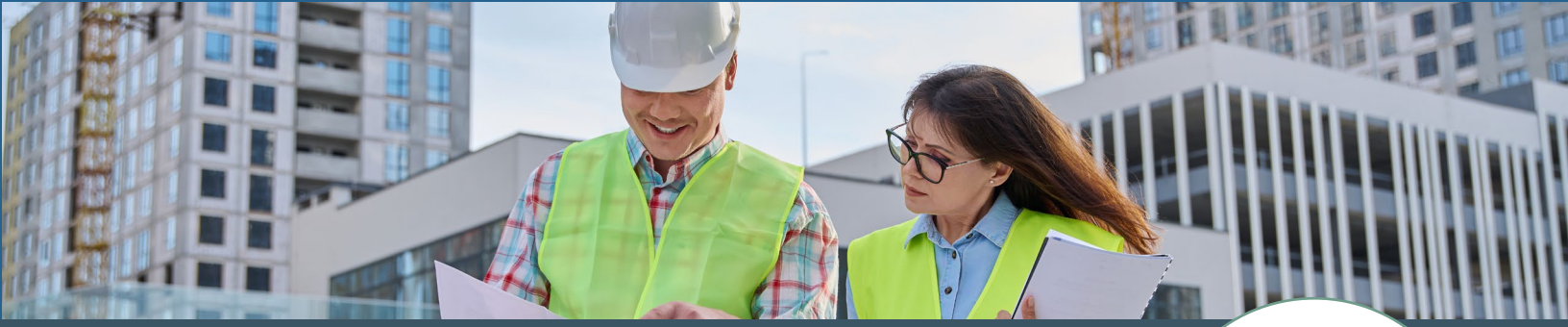

Incorporating Sustainability Into Your New or Upgraded Facility

Dane County Office of Energy & Climate Change

When your small business or nonprofit invests in a big project—a new facility or a major renovation—maximizing the value of that investment is critical. Prioritizing sustainability can increase project value and reduce operating costs for decades.

Step 1: Commit to Specific Sustainability Goals

The term sustainability can carry different meanings depending on your goals. Clarify what sustainability means for your project and convey that information to your contractors.

Here are some sustainability goal examples:

- Meet a recognized building performance standard, like Net Zero, Passive House, or LEED
- Use 25% less energy than the same facility built to Wisconsin's building code
- Reduce energy bills by 30% by installing high-efficiency systems
- Reduce environmental impact by conserving water and increasing the use of recycled materials
- Apply for and qualify as a Dane County Climate Champion

Organizational priorities and reputational value:
Consider your organization's culture and reputation. Will an investment in sustainability provide value to your organization? Is the investment aligned with your mission and values? What about your customer priorities? An investment in sustainability can signal a commitment to customers as well as existing and prospective employees who share these values.

Step 2: Identify Solutions That Meet Your Goals

Consult contractors for recommendations on appropriate technologies and construction techniques that will achieve your goals. Options might include:

- **Energy efficiency, water-saving, and weatherization strategies.** Improvements that reduce energy and water use and operating costs, without sacrificing comfort, productivity, or service quality.
- **Electrification technologies.** Heat pumps and other systems that reduce greenhouse gas emissions.
- **Low-carbon construction strategies.** Reduce the emissions associated with construction by choosing low-carbon options.
- **Renewable energy strategies.** Cut ongoing energy costs and emissions via systems that harvest energy from the sun or the earth.

Step 3: Finalize Plan, Weighing Costs and Benefits

Facilities can last for decades so be sure to consider both the upfront and ongoing operational costs to better understand the costs and benefits of each solution.

Calculate simple payback period
A high-efficiency heating system may cost $5,000 more up front than a standard model but will save you $1,000 per year in operating costs. In this example, the simple payback period is five years, meaning the cost to choose the high-efficiency heating system pays for itself in the first five years. If system lasts 15 years, it will save $10,000 in energy costs over its remaining 10 years of service.

Compare maintenance costs
High-efficiency equipment often includes higher-quality components, which can reduce maintenance expenses. LED lighting, for example, can last more than 25 years in many applications, reducing replacement costs and the staff time required to change lights.

Available incentives, rebates, and tax credits
Focus on Energy helps make sustainable energy projects more affordable and achievable. Visit Focus on Energy's Business or Nonprofit webpage: focusonenergy.com/business or focusonenergy.com/business/nonprofits.

Before You Decide

Ask contractors for installation, operation, and maintenance cost comparisons, and request information about rebates that may offset upfront costs.

Get all the facts before you make decisions that will affect your energy bills for decades.

You may also be eligible for tax credits, exemptions, PACE financing, performance contracts, and/or economic development incentives. Visit OECC's information on federal tax credits: daneclimateaction.org/what-you-can-do/federal-funding and the Wisconsin's Interactive Incentive Finder: revenue.wi.gov/Pages/Businesses/incentives-finder.aspx.

Step 4: Showcase Your Sustainable Facility

Many features that make a facility sustainable—insulation, efficient heating and cooling systems—are invisible to visitors. If you invest in sustainability, make that investment visible to employees, customers, and visitors.

Here are some ideas:

- Educational signage
- Engaging content on websites
- Recognition from the Dane County Climate Champions program; visit daneclimateaction.org/initiatives/Climate-Champions

How We Can Help

- Understanding incentives and funding resources
- Navigating contractors
- Advocating for clean energy projects
- Sustainable building design

Need More Information to Get Started?

Check out daneclimateaction.org/what-you-can-do/Resources-Businesses.

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