



Book Guide

SETTING PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY GOALS

CHAPTER FOUR



PRACTICAL SUSTAINABILITY

How-to Guide: Setting Practical Sustainability Goals

Chapter 4

Why “Practical” Goals Matter

In the drive toward sustainability, ambitious “moonshot” goals can certainly capture attention—but they often fall short in driving meaningful action. When goals feel unrealistic or overly abstract, teams may struggle with inertia or confusion about where to begin. By contrast, setting practical, incremental goals rooted in clear metrics empowers organizations to take immediate, measurable steps. These smaller wins generate momentum, foster a sense of ownership across teams, and build a track record of success that can be shared both internally and externally. *Practical Sustainability* wisely advises, “Instead of one big moonshot goal, try step goals... like reducing landfill amounts by 5–10% in the next 2–3 years.” (Practical Sustainability, p. 90)

Writing SMART Sustainability Goals

Effective goals should follow the SMART format, with a focus on metrics and timeline. Below is a custom framework adapted from the book:

Goal Part	What to Include	Example
Specific	What exactly is being improved or reduced?	Reduce landfill waste
Measurable	Include a number or clear outcome.	By 10%
Attainable	Within reason, based on available resources.	Using existing recycling programs
Relevant	Tied to business operations or sustainability values.	From packaging waste in assembly
Time-bound	A defined timeframe for accountability.	Over 2 years

Example Goal:

“Reduce solid waste by 5% in the next 2–3 years.” (Practical Sustainability, p. 90)

Why it works:

- Tied to metrics
- Timebound
- Attainable
- Communicable across teams

Examples of “Low-Hanging Fruit” Goals

These are easy wins—simple changes that provide high value and quick return:

Industry	Goal Example	Why It’s Practical
Manufacturing	Replace gas-powered lawn tools with electric models	Supports a no onsite fossil fuel energy goal
Packaging	Eliminate mixed-material packaging	Increases recyclability; reduces waste-hauling fees
Office Work	Default double-sided printing	Cuts paper cost and usage
Warehousing	Install motion-sensing lights	Reduces energy usage with short ROI
Retail	Incentivize reusable bags	Reduces single-use plastics; builds customer engagement

Practice

Write the above examples of “Low-Hanging Fruit” goals in the SMART goal format.

1. Replace gas-powered lawn tools

2. Eliminate mixed-material printing

3. Default double-sided printing

4. Install motion-sensing lights

5. Incentivize reusable bags

What are “Combination Goals”?

Combination goals are strategic sustainability targets that align multiple objectives—waste reduction, product or process design, recyclability, and cost/labor efficiency—into a single initiative. These are powerful because they embed sustainability into the innovation cycle rather than treating it as an afterthought. (Practical Sustainability, p. 91)

Real-World Example from Practical Sustainability

“We reworked the process and installed a baler right next to the manufacturing line...”

“...engineers focused on making sure any scrap material was either reduced or able to be recycled.” (Practical Sustainability, pgs. 91-92)

This goal addressed:

- Product design: Redesigning layout for efficiency
- Material recovery: Scrap could be baled and recycled
- Labor efficiency: No extra steps for employees
- Cost savings: Reduced hauling and material purchasing

Combination Goal Template

Use this when launching new products, services, or manufacturing processes.

Component	Details
Trigger Point	New product, service, process, or facility
Sustainability Layers	Waste reduction- Material recyclability- Cost or labor reduction
SMART Goal Format	Clear, measurable, time-bound, and realistic

Example Goal:

Ensure 75% of manufacturing scrap from [Product X] is directly recyclable or reintegrated into the production process by Q4 2025.

Practice Activity: Crafting Your Own Combination Goal

Step 1: Reflect on Upcoming Launches

Think about something new your organization is rolling out:

- Are you launching a new product, service, or process soon?
- Is there an equipment upgrade or facility redesign on the horizon?

Write It Here:

Example: “We’re introducing a new injection-molded plastic part for our product line.”

Your Example:

Step 2: Identify Sustainability Angles

Ask yourself:

- Is there scrap or waste generated in the process?
- Can the materials be recycled or reused internally?
- Can the workflow be simplified to reduce handling or energy?
- Are there customer-facing sustainability benefits you can market?

Step 3: Draft a Combination Goal

Now, write your goal using the SMART format. Be sure to:

- Include a metric (% or unit)
- Tie it to a product/process
- Add a deadline

Template

By [DATE], ensure [X%] of [MATERIAL/PROCESS] from [PRODUCT/PROCESS NAME] is [REUSED/RECYCLED] or [REDESIGNED] to reduce [WASTE/COST/LABOR].

Your SMART Combination Goal:

Step 4: Next Steps - Make It Happen

Who needs to be involved? (See the How-to Guide: Create a Sustainability Team)

What data do you need? (See the How-to Guide: Measure What Matters)

What's the timeline for review?

How will you communicate the goal to your team? (See below)

Section 5: Communicating Goals & Engaging Employees

Communication makes or breaks implementation.

Best Practices:

- **Be Transparent:** Why this goal matters (environmental + financial lens)
- **Be Localized:** Break the main goal down by department
 - E.g., Each team reduces its own trash by 5%.
- **Make It Personal:** Show how success benefits each employee
 - Bonuses, job stability, brand reputation
- **Tell the Story:** Celebrate progress with internal wins and case studies
- **Encourage questions like:**
 - How does this goal impact my role?
 - What support do I have?
 - How can I contribute creatively?

Section 6: Ultimate Goals and Vision

While ultimate goals (like net-zero) are inspirational, they should stay internal unless milestones are reached.

Key advice from Practical Sustainability:

“Do not publicize your ultimate goal unless you actually reach it.” (Practical Sustainability, p. 90)

How to Use Ultimate Goals:

For management and planning

Helps align long-term investments and product development

Frame all step goals as building blocks toward this

Example:

Ultimate goal: Eliminate all fossil fuel usage from operations.

Step goal: Convert lawn care equipment to electric by end of 2025.

Goal Alignment Checklist

Strategic Fit

- ❑ Connected to a business priority or organizational mission
- ❑ Supports long-term growth, resilience, or risk reduction
- ❑ Aligned with company sustainability values

Stakeholder Relevance

- ❑ Stakeholders were consulted during goal-setting
- ❑ Addresses customer, community, or regulatory expectations
- ❑ Communicated in a meaningful way for stakeholders

Operational Feasibility

- ❑ Team has or can obtain necessary resources
- ❑ Scope is realistic for timeline and capacity
- ❑ Responsible departments or owners assigned

Measurement & Accountability

- ❑ Metrics and data sources identified
- ❑ Timeline for tracking and reporting defined
- ❑ Feedback loops or review process established

Cross-Functional Integration

- ❑ Goal complements existing sustainability or business efforts
- ❑ Conflicts or redundancies identified and addressed
- ❑ Roles across departments are clear

Continuous Improvement

- ❑ Plan exists to review performance regularly
- ❑ Goal will inform future planning or iteration
- ❑ Potential to scale, replicate, or evolve the goal

Alignment Notes & Action Plan

Area Needing Alignment	Action Item	Owner	Deadline