



Greening your business



What is greening your business?

Most of us are well aware of the need to be environmentally responsible in our daily lives. Social entrepreneurs, in particular, tend to be eager to translate their personal environmental values to their own organisation. In some cases, the environment itself is central to the social enterprise's products and services. Well known examples include London Community Recycling Network, Bike Works, Aardvark Recycling and Green-Works.

However, for many social enterprises, especially those at early stages, 'greening the business' is not always a priority and is not often integrated into the overall strategy. But being a social enterprise is not just about creating social impact. It is also about being sustainable in the long-term, both financially and environmentally (see our guide on Planning for sustainability for further information). The good news is that greening your business can help you to achieve all three.

Greening your business is about creating efficiency to reduce your environmental footprint and making choices to ensure that your enterprise is as environmentally friendly as possible. It is also about implementing policies and procedures that will ensure this happens, and that can be measured and improved on proactively.

Why is greening your business important?

A greener organisation is likely to be a more efficient one because it may, for example, have lower energy usage, less resource or materials wastage and reduced travel costs. All these will save you money and help you maintain a healthier cash flow. Over time, these cost savings could be significant, allowing you to perform better financially and to continue generating greater social and/or environmental impact.

There are also increasing demands from important stakeholders such as government, commissioners, funders and customers to demonstrate good environmental practice, especially in the public sector (see our guide on Commissioning and the tendering process for further information).

In some instances there may actually be a legal requirement to show that you are behaving in an environmentally responsible way (see our guide on Ensuring your enterprise complies with legal requirements). There may also be a specific requirement to meet in order to apply for a tender or bid for a contract, for example. So you must have an environmental policy or an environmental management system in place (for more information, visit the Environmental Agency's website).

Environmental responsibility can also play an important role in your customer's decision making process, although it is not always stated explicitly. For example, if a customer is deciding between two similar suppliers, the existence of sound environmental practices can help make the difference between winning a customer and losing it.

Environmentally responsible enterprises also tend to benefit from good public and press relations, and these strengths can be used as part of their marketing strategy (see our guides on Making the most of PR and networks and Communicating key messages). Some enterprises may also be able to get access to grants or other free support to implement or improve their environmental practices, processes and operations.

The best argument for greening your business, however, should be that it is simply the right thing to do.

How does greening your business work?

To 'green your business', you can use three practical steps known as the three Rs - Reduce your usage, Reuse materials, Recycle what you have used.

There are a number of steps that you can easily do yourself or with the help of your team. Other steps involve how you select or work with your suppliers or contractors. In some cases, you may have to collaborate with other organisations in your workplace, or convince your building management or landlord to make things happen.

Here are some specific examples of things your enterprise can do to reduce its environmental impact.

Please note, the examples below are given purely for practical value and are not intended to reflect examples of best practice or leaders in the market – it is up to you to research and select what works best for your organisation.

- Reduce water wastage:
 - Install low volume flushing toilets or waterless urinals. There are also simple and cost-effective ways to save water, such as the Hippo (www.hippo-the-watersaver.co.uk).
 - Regulate water flow from taps or hoses with aerators (that mix air and water), flow restrictors, spray taps or push taps.
- Reduce energy usage:
 - Turn down office heating by one or two degrees, or turn off meeting room and office lights when rooms are not in use.
 - Improve insulation to minimise heat loss, such as adding thick curtains to windows or landing areas or using revolving doors.
 - Use green IT including server virtualisation (running many software servers on one “real” server).
 - Use energy efficient appliances and equipment - look out for the Energy Star symbol (www.eu-energystar.org); you can also use energy saving light bulbs.
 - Set appropriate power management rules on laptops, workstations, servers and peripherals, turning off printers and screens when you leave the office.
 - If you are able to, you can also switch to a green energy supplier like Good Energy (www.goodenergy.co.uk).
- Adopt efficient material usage and printing practices such as printing and photocopying only what is necessary, using reduced toner density, double-sided printing or printing multi-page documents.
- Buy environmentally friendly or recycled paper and stationary products – for example through the Green Stationary Company (www.greenstat.co.uk) and Evolve Papers (www.evolve-papers.com).
- Furnish your office with re-used desks, chairs, bookcases, or give away unwanted items through organisations like Green-Works (www.green-works.co.uk) or through charity shops.
- Minimise food waste and compost or recycle it – organisations such as Aardvark Recycling can help with this (www.aardvarkrecycling.org.uk).
- Think about your purchasing policy – often buying from local suppliers can be better for the environment (e.g. food, catering, flowers, etc).
- Reduce your transportation and logistics footprint by using:
 - Public transport for you and your staff.
 - Encourage cycling.
 - Remote working (working from home).
 - Video conferencing instead of travelling to customers.
 - Outsourcing deliveries to a specialised third party with more efficient vehicles.
 - Using environmentally friendly taxi and transport companies (www.greentomatocars.com, www.addisonlee.com).

Useful ideas

There are also ways your enterprise can go a step further by adopting practices that are good for the environment:

- Offset your carbon emissions through carbon offsetting – this is about balancing the CO2 emissions that your enterprise produces by contributing to projects such as tree planting or supporting environmental initiatives on climate change.
- Get environmental expertise to help you actively cut down your carbon emissions. The following organisations are experts at supporting enterprises in a proactive and effective way:
 - Global Action Plan (www.globalactionplan.org.uk).
 - Carbon Smart (www.carbonsmart.co.uk).
 - London Community Resource Network (www.lcrn.org.uk).
 - Bioregional (www.bioregional.com) .
 - Envirowise (www.envirowise.gov.uk).
- Green schemes, standards and accreditation can also help you and your team ensure that you are progressing towards tangible, realistic environmental objectives. Most have something to offer your social enterprise. Some of the more widely known ones include ISO 14001 - this is an Environmental Management System that will help an organisation of any size or type to:
 - identify and control the environmental impact of its activities, products or services
 - continually improve its environmental performance
 - implement systems to set environmental objectives and targets, to meet them and to demonstrate you have met those targets
- The Green Procurement Code encourages the selection of products and services that minimise environmental impact. It encourages purchasers of goods and services to use their purchasing power to promote productive use of resources and materials. Green procurement is no longer limited to recycled paper but covers most areas of business activity including construction, furniture, IT equipment and transport.
- The Carbon Smart awards is an awards scheme to help businesses of any size take positive, practical steps to reducing their impact on the environment and build a clear, positive environmental message.

Things to look out for with greening your business

You do need to look out for green washing amongst potential suppliers. This happens when a company tries to communicate to its stakeholder groups inappropriate or partially true key messages with regards to their environmental responsibility. Some companies have had short-term success with this approach through good publicity but in the long-term, however, most organisations are exposed and their brands and reputations suffer as a result.

Social enterprise examples

Greening your business also means that you can benefit from contact with many other innovative social enterprises, from furniture recycling companies to ethical flowers.

Here are a couple of examples to give you an idea:

- Green-Works (www.green-works.co.uk) is an award-winning registered charity and social enterprise dedicated to radically changing the way society thinks about waste. Their aim is to turn redundant office furniture into an asset and a resource by reducing, re-using, remanufacturing or recycling all unwanted office furniture to keep it away from landfill. They also provide consultancy services around greening your business.
- Thinking Flowers (www.thinkingflowers.org.uk) is a social enterprise that is a great example of how to 'green your business' in an innovative and creative way. Thinking Flowers provide floral designs and installations for events, businesses, photoshoots and public spaces. All of the flowers and materials used are sourced from sustainable sources, delivered with low-impact transport and packaging. The team then ensures that the waste is recycled, re-used or composted, so that the flowers always return to the earth.

Further information

Visit the Environment Agency website for updated information on environmental issues, regulations and permits:

www.environment-agency.gov.uk

Visit the Recycling Guide website:

www.recycling-guide.org.uk/rrr.html

Visit the UK Climate Impacts Programme (UKCIP) website for information and guidance on the impact and risk of climate change:

www.ukcip.org.uk

Visit the Carbon Trust website for information and guidance to reduce carbon emissions and energy costs:

www.carbontrust.co.uk

Visit the Cabinet Office website for the Greening Government ICT Report:

www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/cio/greening_government_ict.aspx

Visit Net Regs for guidance on environmental regulation:

www.netregs.gov.uk

Visit the BioRegional website for useful tools including a CO2 footprint calculator:

www.bioregional.com

Read the University of East London Green Day blog for thought provoking current discussion around current thinking:

<http://opencarbon.wordpress.com>

Try the Business link online tool to help you identify areas to make savings:

www.businesslink.gov.uk/bdotg/action/layer?topicId=1079446510

Read our guide on Planning for sustainability:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Planning/Planningforsustainability.aspx

Read our guide on Defining success through the Triple Bottom Line:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Monitoringandevaluation/Definingsuccessandthetriplebottomline.aspx

Read our guide on Understanding and managing your suppliers:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Planning/Understandingandmanagingsuppliers.aspx

Read our guide on Ensuring your enterprise complies with legal regulations:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Operations/Compliance/Complyingwithlegalrequirements.aspx

Read our guide on Commissioning and the tendering process:

www.blondon.com/SocialEnterprise/Fundingandfinance/Sourcingfinance/Commissioningandthetenderingprocess.aspx