

Leadership in Sustainability

“Our goal is nothing less than being the global leader in sustainability, and that aspiration carries with it great responsibility to advance on all fronts...”

- Chancellor Philip P. DiStefano (2014 STARS Report)

CU Boulder has three strategic imperatives. Our sustainability and resiliency efforts overlap in all three areas: shaping tomorrow’s leaders, innovation, and our impact to humanity. There are many critical issues around the world that need to be solved through a collaborative effort involving innovation, research, and policy solutions centered on a firm foundation of business and metrics driven analytics. We need to establish, nurture, and expand research, innovation, partnerships and collaboration in the areas of both sustainability and resiliency for our own advancement, for the country and world beyond.

Sustainability provides a central platform for CU to lead in developing, demonstrating, and implementing solutions to what are arguably among the greatest challenges of our times. By unleashing innovations that result in transformational solutions, CU can help redefine the relevance and impact of higher education, and better prepare our graduates for successful and impactful careers, thereby advancing our core mission.

Based on the history, our foci, and our aspiration for leadership in sustainability at a global level, this proposal complements our strategic goals through intentional sustainability-related leadership and activities revolving around academic, research, operational, student and community engagement.

CU Boulder’s success in achieving our goal of global leadership in sustainability hinges on the effective incorporation of sustainability into all aspects of the University. Thoughtful integration of sustainability principles into all our activities and operations will create new research opportunities, enable new areas of funding, help attract and retain new highly qualified researchers and students, and catalyze new university-business partnerships. Sustainability for the campus also means that we must make improvements on optimizing use of our existing facilities, reducing energy and water consumption, integrating smart energy and renewable technologies, promoting sustainability in procurement, exploring alternative transportation options, and waste reduction... among many other things.

Elements of this endeavor include, but may not be limited to:

- Becoming a “think tank” and develop highly respected thought leaders that can help shape and drive our nation to a more sustainable and resilient future.
- Seamlessly integrating cooperation amongst faculty, staff, and students in the areas of sustainability, energy, and resilience.
- Developing meaningful partnerships across academia, government, and industry to work together to identify and solve pressing issues related to sustainability and resilience.
- Use of the campus by both academic and operational endeavors as a “living laboratory” that provide both important test beds for emerging solutions, and tactile demonstration of those solutions that can be taken to scale with sufficient speed.
- Designing and implementing crosscutting research and teaching opportunities.
- Building and operating the means for coordination through a collegial leadership, governance, strategic planning and coordination structure.

- Developing and implementing consistent and effective branding, marketing and advancement opportunities.

OPPORTUNITY

While CU-Boulder has considerable sustainability assets and has been a historic leader in sustainability initiatives, these have been somewhat uncoordinated across academics, research, teaching, student and community engagement. As one CU leader noted, “we’re good at operating in our individual cylinders of excellence.”

Our peer institutions at Stanford, the University of British Columbia (UBC) and Penn State have recently accelerated new strategic sustainability efforts resulting in their global recognition as leaders because they are integrating sustainability across their disparate campus units. *For us to become a leader in this arena, our efforts and investments into sustainability excellence must become a priority for the campus. It cannot become an afterthought. It must become a core value across all our constituents at CU Boulder. We have the desire. We are catalyzed to build on our growing momentum. We need our faculty, staff, students and our leaders to make this a priority.*

PROPOSED NEXT STEPS

1. Establish a Sustainability Council in the first quarter of 2018 to provide a forum for innovation, collaboration, and guidance across CU’s sustainability efforts. The Council will bring together representatives from all campus sectors (faculty, administrators, staff, and students), as well as engage a collection of external experts.
2. Develop a campus vision for sustainability and resilience
3. Establish sustainability goals in order to inform new, robust, science-based targets for campus transformation, research endeavors, academic direction, community/corporate partnerships and student engagement.
4. Create a comprehensive branding, marketing and advancement campaign to capitalize on CU Boulder’s ongoing and emerging sustainability initiatives to help tell our story, boost reputation, improve recruitment/retention, and ensure we meet our advancement, research funding, and grant award goals.

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