

Sustainability NGOs – Opportunities for Peer-to-Peer Knowledge and Collaborative Advocacy

Whether your company is in the early stages of its sustainability journey or well down the path, participation in one or more sustainability-focused non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can be a cost effective way to enhance your company's knowledge of best practices and trending issues, elevate sustainability as an element of your company's brand, and lend your company's support to collective advocacy for government policies that will facilitate achievement of your company's sustainability goals. How to choose an NGO and level of engagement will hinge on a variety of factors, including your company's industry, the status and scope of its sustainability efforts, the level of personnel that will be involved, and your core objectives for participation.



Here are some issues and ideas to consider:

What sustainability efforts exist in trade associations in which your company is currently a member?



What are some NGOs that help with climate policy advocacy?



Where can you find cross-industry benchmarking and peer knowledge for your company's sustainability efforts?



What are some NGOs that help companies with natural resource conservation?



Which NGOs offer meaningful assistance for corporations seeking to transition their businesses to renewable energy?



What are some of the risks to manage when participating in sustainability focused NGOs?



What sustainability efforts exist in trade associations in which your company is currently a member?

Trade associations serving your company's industry are a great place to look initially for opportunities to learn about and collaborate on sustainability initiatives. Many, but not all, trade associations have sustainability committees or initiatives that provide a range of different opportunities for corporate engagement. Below are several examples of ways that trade associations promote corporate sustainability:

- **Sharing sustainability science and technology.**
 - The [American Forest & Paper Association](#) shares technologies and best practices for sustainable forest management and energy efficiency and waste water management in paper production.
 - The [Sustainable Phosphorus Alliance](#) gathers and synthesizes existing science for its members, and helps sponsor and develop new research and development into sustainable sourcing and management of phosphorus resources.
- **Facilitating sustainability standards-setting.**
 - The [International Air Transport Association](#) (IATA) created a waste handbook that helps airlines adopt standards to reduce, reuse, and recycle the waste produced onboard flights sustainably and has established, in partnership with ASTM International, standards and certification programs for sustainable aviation fuel.
 - The [American Chemistry Council](#) has for a long time been helping companies improve safety through their Responsible Care principles. Responsible Care companies have three times a better safety record than their peers in the chemical sector.

- **Guiding industry ESG disclosure standards.**
 - [Nareit](#), the trade association for real estate investment trusts, publishes a Guide to ESG Reporting Frameworks that provides practical advice to assist REITs in navigating and complying with the range of different ESG reporting schemes.
 - [Edison Electric Institute](#) (EEI) and the American Gas Association (AGA) have collaborated on the creation of a voluntary ESG reporting template for electric and gas utilities.
- **Highlighting an industry's sustainability efforts to the public.**
 - The [American Cleaning Institute](#) launched the Cold Water Saves communication campaign to inform millennials of the benefits of washing clothes in cold water.
 - [IATA](#) started the Fly Aware initiative, a campaign that informs travelers of the aviation industry and passengers' sustainability actions.
- **Advocating for government policies that make it easier for companies to transition to more sustainable options.**
 - The [Consumer Brands Association](#) has convened a Recycling Leadership Council that brings together key stakeholders in the packaging industry to formulate and advocate for a better U.S. recycling system.



Where can you find cross-industry benchmarking and peer knowledge for your company's sustainability efforts?

- The [World Business Council on Sustainable Development](#) (WBCSD) is a global, CEO-led organization of over 200 leading businesses working together to accelerate the transition to a sustainable world. WBCSD operates programs or projects addressing circular economy, cities & mobility, climate & energy, food & nature, and people – largely focused on the contribution of businesses in progressing the UN Sustainable Development Goals.
- [The World Resources Institute](#) (WRI), a sustainability data-rich, global non-profit organization that seeks to move big ideas into action at the nexus of environment, economic opportunity, and human well-being through the approach of “count it, change it, scale it”, has organized a Corporate Consultative Group that brings together over 30 Fortune 500 companies and leading minds in sustainability to advance business practices that mitigate risks and support sustainable growth.
- The [World Economic Forum](#) is a leading international organization for public-private cooperation that engages political, business, cultural, and other leaders of society to shape global, regional, and industry agendas. With over 1,000 corporate members, it is founded on the stakeholder theory, which asserts that an organization is accountable to all parts of society. It convenes global meetings and organizes focused committee efforts such as the CEO Action Group for the EU Green Deal.




Which NGOs offer meaningful assistance for corporations seeking to transition their businesses to renewable energy?

- The [Renewable Energy Buyers Alliance](#) (REBA)
 - REBA is an alliance of corporate energy buyers across multiple industries that collaborates to promote viable pathways for corporate procurement of renewable energy.
 - They also provide their members a plethora of resources, such as peer-to-peer engagement, “how to” guidebooks, and boot camps.
- [American Council on Renewable Energy](#) (ACORE)
 - ACORE is a 501(c)(3) national nonprofit organization that unites finance, policy, and technology to accelerate the transition to a renewable energy economy. ACORE provides peer-to-peer engagement, publications, webinars, conferences, and other educational programming on public policy and finance to promote the growth in renewable energy.
- [The Business Council for Sustainable Energy](#) (BCSE)
 - BCSE is a membership organization comprised of small and middle market businesses that advocates for energy and environmental policies that promote markets for clean, efficient, and sustainable energy products and services.
- [Advanced Energy Economy](#) (AEE)
 - AEE is a national association of over 100 companies with a mission to transform public policy to enable rapid growth of advanced energy businesses. AEE seeks to educate, engage, and advocate at the federal level, in wholesale electricity markets, and more than a dozen states for executive actions, legislation, and regulations that expand the size and value of markets for advanced energy products and services.



What are some NGOs that help with climate policy advocacy?

- [The Center for Climate and Energy Solutions](#) (C2ES)
 - This nonprofit works with policymakers, businesses, and other stakeholders to devise and push forward practical solutions to climate change and sponsors its Business Environmental Leadership Council, which is comprised of 35 mostly Fortune 500 companies across multiple industry sectors that are engaged in a range of policy initiatives seeking action to address climate change.
- [The Climate Group](#)
 - This NGO catalyzes partnerships among large businesses and government leaders to shift global markets and policy and help scale innovation and solutions, including with corporate alliances that are committed to 100% renewable power, 100% electric vehicle fleets, proliferation of LED lighting, and enhanced energy productivity.
- The [Climate Leadership Council](#)
 - The Climate Leadership Council is an international policy institute founded in collaboration with a who's who of business, opinion, and environmental leaders to promote a carbon dividends framework as the most cost-effective, equitable and politically-viable climate solution.



What are some NGOs that help companies with natural resource conservation?

- [The Nature Conservancy](#)
 - This nonprofit organization works with companies as they seek to become more environmentally sustainable to help businesses with their conservation planning to achieve real conservation gains around the world.
- [The World Wildlife Fund](#)
 - WWF seeks to measurably conserve the world's most biologically diverse and ecologically important places through business collaborations with a broad cross-section of companies to reduce both direct and indirect impacts on priority places.



What are some of the risks to manage when participating in sustainability focused NGOs?

- **Divulging sensitive information that could be misused**
 - Though collaborating on sustainability efforts with industry peers has many benefits, companies must also be careful to balance collective innovation with protecting trade secrets and other sensitive information.
 - Despite their corporate partnerships, NGOs may still expose poor performance on sustainability efforts by corporations, which can breed mistrust and bad publicity.

- **Antitrust considerations**

- Collaborating with peers in the industry on sustainability efforts may pose antitrust risks. Care should be taken to counsel and caution all members on antitrust compliance guidelines.
- Joint advocacy for better government policies is less risky in terms of antitrust law but takes away some control from the private sector in shaping sustainability policies.

- **Wasting company resources**

- It is important to select the right sustainability programs and right personnel for your company in order to use company resources as efficiently as possible.
- When partnering with NGOs, companies must be willing to provide sufficient resources to assure effectiveness of the NGO engagement beyond mere brand association with the NGO.

- **Lack of buy-in**

- Businesses must be willing to work with NGOs toward shared goals rather than simply focus on improving their public image. Thinking only of your company's publicity will cause both NGO and company to lose credibility.
- Company leadership needs to dedicate appropriate personnel and provide visible support for corporate engagement with selected NGOs to assure effectiveness and continuity of these efforts in support of corporate sustainability goals.

Sustainability Toolkit

 Explore the topics	Defining Sustainability	Public Policy: Climate Change	Public Policy: COVID-19	Public Policy: Environmental Justice	Public Policy: UN Sustainable Development Goals
Engaging and Advising BODs	Investor Expectations	Corporate Disclosure: The Basics	Corporate Disclosure: Standards and Initiatives	Setting Corporate Goals	M&A and JV Transactions
Green Bonds and SSLs	Carbon Markets	Marketing Claims	Crisis Management	Insurance Implications	Sustainability NGOs