

Sustainability & Museums

Conversation Guide

Sustainability means healthy people, communities, and environments, now and in the future. Cultural organizations like museums, zoos, and gardens can promote learning about sustainability through programs and exhibits, build community partnerships for sustainability goals, and lead by example by adopting sustainable practices.



USING THIS GUIDE

Sustainability efforts often span people and departments. Use this guide in meetings, workshops, or one-on-one conversations with others at your organization to identify existing sustainability efforts, create a sustainability vision and goal, and identify pathways to reach those goals. Encourage yourself and others to be both open-minded and critical in answering the questions below. Be sure to consider your organization's public-facing efforts as well internal efforts like changes to policies or operations.

DISCUSSION POINTS

Sustainability vision and goals

- What is our organization's goal and vision for sustainability?
- How does sustainability fit our existing mission and priorities?
- How does sustainability span people and departments?

Current programs and efforts

- How well do our existing public-facing programs support our organization's vision for sustainability?
- How well do our behind-the-scenes operations support our organization's vision for sustainability?

Limitations and challenges

- Are our current programs and operations limited to certain topics, departments, or audiences?
- What improvements or new programs and practices can we implement to better support our vision for sustainability?
- How can we involve other people and departments in sustainability efforts?

- How can our programs and operations be changed to reach diverse audiences in meaningful ways?

Increasing impact

- How do the sustainability actions of our organization impact our broader community?
- What can we do to further sustainable change in our community?
- Who can we partner with or support to further our impact?

TIPS FOR FACILITATING CONVERSATIONS

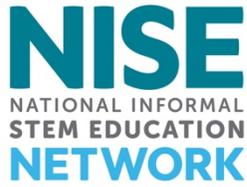
- Provide a clear description of the focus of the conversation so that participants understand the goals of the discussion.
- Try to create an environment that is welcoming and where individuals feel safe, comfortable, and valued as contributors and learners. You might stress, for example, that there are no right or wrong answers and that all ideas and perspectives are important.
- Encourage everyone to speak, and find ways for all participants to contribute their ideas and perspectives. For example, introduce a question and have everyone jot down their ideas on post-its for five minutes and then share with the group. Try pair discussions for five to ten minutes and then share in a larger group discussion. Pause and encourage those who have not yet talked to offer their ideas.
- Give people time to think after you pose a question or as people build on each other's ideas. Be comfortable with silence.
- Use prompts, seek feedback, and encourage others to contribute and build on each other's ideas.
- Establish a process that honors differences and encourages communication. For example, you might ask for other points of view on a topic.



ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Need help starting the conversation? NISE Network has a variety of other resources that can ground your conversation: <https://www.nisenet.org/catalog/sustainability-science-technology-museums-professional-development-resources>

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This guide was inspired by the Center for Advancement of Informal Science Education (CAISE) conversation guide for broadening participation in STEM, available here:
<https://www.informalscience.org/sites/default/files/BP-Conversation-Guide.pdf>

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The *Rob and Melani Walton Sustainability in Science and Technology Museums* program is supported through funding from the Rob and Melani Walton Foundation