



THE SUSTAINABLE CAMPUS PLAYBOOK

*A Communications Strategy Guide for Schools, Universities & Educational
Institutions*

Strategy · Campaign Toolkit · Implementation · Certification Alignment

Your Sustainability Program Deserves to Be Heard

Your campus has made real progress.

Energy use is down. The waste diversion rate is climbing. Buildings have earned certifications. The operations team did that work. They should be proud of it.

Ask a random student, employee, or parent whether any of it happened and you will mostly get blank looks.

This is the sustainable campus problem, not the sustainability part, the communication part. Most campuses are further along operationally than the people on them realize. The goals exist. The data exists. The work is real. What is missing is the infrastructure that connects all of it to the people who live, learn, and work inside it every day.

The gap between what your campus is doing and what your campus community knows you are doing is a communications gap. It is solvable with design, strategy, and the right set of tools.

This playbook is not a guide to being more sustainable. It is a guide to communicating sustainability, to the students who sort waste incorrectly not because they don't care but because nobody made it clear how, to the employees who cannot name a single sustainability initiative their organization is running, and to the board members and accreditation bodies evaluating whether your institution walks the talk.

WHAT THIS PLAYBOOK COVERS

Seven parts. Each one builds on the previous.

Part One is strategy, the three questions every program must answer before designing any deliverable. Part Two is the campaign toolkit, eight sample deliverables, each built from a real brief on one of three fictional campuses. Part Three is implementation, a phased rollout framework designed for durability over ambition. Part Four is certification alignment, how the communications work and the certification documentation work are the same work when coordinated properly. Parts Five and Six are reference material: campus profiles and key concepts. This conclusion is Part Seven.

You don't need to read it cover to cover. Start with the section most relevant to where your program is right now. Use the campaign brief template before you design anything. Use the channel effectiveness table before you write anything. Come back to the certification alignment section when documentation season arrives.

THE THREE FICTIONAL CAMPUSES

Every sample in this playbook is built around one of three fictional institutions, each representing a distinct challenge and a distinct budget reality.

Piedmont University	18,000 students. Waste diversion rate stalled at 64%. Operations are correct. The gap is behavioral.
Piedmont Health Sciences	400-bed teaching hospital. Patient waste sorting accuracy at 41%. TRUE Zero Waste certification in progress.
Clearwater Technology Park	3,200 employees. Net zero 2035 commitment announced. Four months later, 31% of employees can name a single initiative.

Different contexts. Same fundamental challenge. The framework in this playbook applies to all three, and to your campus.

Know Who You're Talking To

The three questions every program must answer before designing a single poster or sending a single email.

Most sustainability communication fails before it starts. Not because the design is wrong or the message is unclear. Because the team skipped the strategy and went straight to the tactics. They made a poster. They sent a newsletter. And nothing measurably changed.

The reason is almost always the same. The communication was designed for a general audience with a general message and a general hope that someone would do something different. General doesn't change behavior. Specific does.

QUESTION ONE: WHO ACTUALLY HAS TO CHANGE?

Every sustainability goal implies a specific behavior change by a specific population. Audience mapping is the exercise of naming those populations explicitly before designing anything. Not 'the campus community', that is not an audience, it is a category.

Students — Residential	Daily waste sorting, energy use, water consumption. Highest behavior change potential. Shortest attention span for institutional communication.
Students — Academic	Lab waste, print reduction, sustainable purchasing. Motivated by values when the connection is made explicit.
Faculty & Researchers	Equipment energy use, research travel carbon. Motivated by peer norms and professional identity, not institutional directives.
Administrative Staff	Paper and supply waste, energy use at workstations. Motivated by ease. Will change behavior when the right behavior is the default.
Clinical Staff	Medical waste segregation, supply chain choices. Motivated by patient outcomes and regulatory compliance.
Patients & Visitors	Sorting at public waste stations. Limited attention, low prior context, high importance for WELL certification documentation.
Facilities & Operations	The implementers, not the target of behavior change campaigns but essential partners in executing them accurately.

Leadership & Board	Sustainability reporting, budget allocation. Motivated by reputation, accreditation, and ESG disclosure requirements.
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The first deliverable any program should produce is an audience map, one row per population, with their behavior change role, their primary motivation, and the channel that reaches them most effectively. The act of filling it out forces the clarity that prevents generic campaigns.

You cannot write a message for everyone. When you try, you write a message for no one. Name the person. Name the behavior. Write for that.

QUESTION TWO: WHAT BEHAVIOR CHANGE, SPECIFICALLY?

Sustainability goals are set in operational metrics. These are the right goals. They are the wrong brief for a communications campaign. A campaign needs a behavior brief, a translation of the operational metric into the specific action a specific person needs to take differently.

Operational Goal	Reduce waste to landfill by 30 percent
Behavior Brief	Residence hall students correctly sort food waste into compost bins at the Morrison Dining Hall tray return, beginning Week 3 of fall semester
Operational Goal	75 percent waste diversion rate
Behavior Brief	Clinical staff in the outpatient wing correctly segregate pharmaceutical waste from general medical waste at the point of disposal

The behavior brief forces three things: it names the specific person, describes the specific action, and identifies the specific context. A communication designed from a behavior brief is immediately testable, you can observe whether the behavior changed, and immediately evaluable if it didn't.

62%	Of sustainability behavior change campaigns that set specific, observable behavioral targets achieve measurable results. Of campaigns that set general awareness goals, fewer than 20% produce any documented behavior change (Opower/Oracle Utilities, 2019).
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QUESTION THREE: WHICH CHANNEL REACHES THEM?

Channel selection is where the most money gets wasted. Posters in locations nobody reads. Emails with 12 percent open rates. The channel determines whether the communication reaches the audience at all, independent of how well-designed the message is.

CHANNEL EFFECTIVENESS BY AUDIENCE	
1.	Residential students: point-of-behavior signage at the waste station, the laundry room, the shower. Peer-to-peer social norms. Email is low effectiveness. Campus-wide announcements are near-zero.
2.	Administrative staff: team-level communication from direct supervisors, default-setting, brief in-meeting updates. Posters and newsletters are adequate for awareness but low for behavior change.
3.	Clinical staff: unit huddle communication from charge nurses or department heads, point-of-care signage at the exact disposal station, compliance training integration. Generic sustainability emails have very low effectiveness in clinical environments.
4.	Faculty and researchers: peer-published norms data ('78% of your department has completed the audit'), department-level communication from chairs. Institutional directive tone actively reduces engagement in academic cultures.
5.	Patients and visitors: simple visual point-of-decision signage with minimal text. QR codes linking to brief explanations. Warm framing that connects sustainable design to their care experience.
6.	Board and leadership: quarterly dashboard with peer institution benchmarking, certification milestone announcements, third-party recognition. They are not reading the campus sustainability newsletter.

<p>WELL Mind — M07: Occupant Survey</p>	<p><i>WELL requires documented evidence of occupant engagement with building health and wellness features. Audience mapping and channel selection documentation directly supports this credit, demonstrating that communications were designed for specific audiences with specific behavioral goals, not just distributed.</i></p>
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<p>Fitwel Occupant Engagement Credits</p>	<p><i>Fitwel awards credits for documented occupant engagement programs. A structured communications strategy with audience maps and behavior briefs provides the documentation evidence Fitwel assessors require.</i></p>
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PUTTING IT TOGETHER: THE CAMPAIGN BRIEF

Before any deliverable gets built, a one-page campaign brief connects the three questions into a single document. Every designer, writer, and communications coordinator works from it. It prevents scope creep and creates shared understanding of what success looks like before the campaign launches.

CAMPAIGN BRIEF TEMPLATE
1. Campaign name: One short internal reference phrase. Not the tagline.
2. Target audience: One specific population. Not 'students' , 'first-year residential students in North Quad residence halls.'
3. Behavior change goal: [Audience] will [action] in [context] by [date]. One sentence.
4. Current baseline: What is the current behavior or metric? Without a baseline, there is no measurement of change.
5. Success metric: Name the measurement before the campaign launches , not after.
6. Key message: One sentence. The single most important thing the audience needs to understand to change the behavior.
7. Primary channel: The most effective channel for this audience in this context. Secondary channels that reinforce it.
8. Timeline: Launch date, measurement date, campaign end, or refresh date.

SECTION SUMMARY

- Effective sustainability communication starts with strategy, not tactics. Generic campaigns produce awareness. Specific campaigns produce behavior change.
- Audience mapping names each population, their motivation structure, and the channels that reach them. It is the first document every program should produce.
- A behavior brief translates an operational metric into a specific observable action by a specific person in a specific context. It is the brief all designers and writers work from.
- Channel selection is the most undervalued decision in institutional sustainability communications. The right message in the wrong channel does not change behavior.
- WELL and Fitwel credits reward structured communications strategy with documented behavioral goals , making the strategy work double duty as certification evidence.

Eight Deliverables. Three Campuses. One Goal.

Every sample is a real artifact built from a completed campaign brief. Read the brief before the deliverable.

Each deliverable here is built from a completed campaign brief. The audience is named. The behavior change goal is specific. The channel was chosen because it is the most effective one for that audience in that context. The design and copy decisions follow directly from the brief, not from aesthetic preference.

DELIVERABLE 1 — SUSTAINABILITY GOALS DASHBOARD

Campus: Piedmont University

The sustainability goals dashboard is not a campaign, it is infrastructure. It exists before any campaign launches and persists after each one ends. It is the single source of truth for where the campus stands against its sustainability commitments, the answer to the question asked in a meeting on a Tuesday in March, not just in the annual report.

Piedmont's dashboard displays six metrics on defined cadences, energy, and water monthly, waste and transportation quarterly, and carbon annually. Each shows current performance, annual target, and a three-year trend line.

DASHBOARD DESIGN PRINCIPLES

1. One number per metric, dominant. Readable in 30 seconds without processing a table or paragraph.
2. Target always visible alongside actual. A 64% diversion rate means nothing without knowing the target is 75%.
3. Trend direction, not just current value. A three-year sparkline answers the direction question in one glance.
4. Update cadence labeled. A dashboard that might be stale is not trusted.
5. Link to methodology. Every number links to a one-page explanation of how it is calculated.

LEED O+M <i>Site Management Policy SS-p</i>	<i>LEED credits ongoing sustainability performance tracking. A public-facing dashboard recording performance against defined targets provides continuous tracking evidence the credit requires.</i>
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DELIVERABLE 2 — BEHAVIOR CHANGE POSTER SERIES

Campus: Piedmont University — Morrison Dining Hall, North Quad

The Sort Smarter campaign addresses uncertainty, not apathy. Students sort incorrectly not because they don't care but because in the moment, tray in hand, queue behind them, three bins in front, they are not certain which bin is correct. Uncertainty defaults to landfill. The campaign clarifies at the exact point of decision.

Poster 1 — Tray Return	Large-format bin identification at eye level. Visual icons for the top 10 items sorted incorrectly. No body copy, the icon and color are the message.
Poster 2 — Residence Hall	Peer norm message: '74% of North Quad residents sorted correctly last week.' Updated monthly with real data.
Poster 3 — Entrance	Campaign awareness. QR code linking to the full sorting guide. One sentence of context.
QR Code Card	Credit-card-sized pocket sorting guide. The only campaign element that leaves the dining hall with the student.

3x	Higher recycling accuracy when waste station signage uses visual icons rather than text lists, independent of language, literacy level, or prior sustainability engagement (Keep America Beautiful, 2020).
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DELIVERABLE 3 — WAYFINDING AND LABEL SYSTEM

Campus: Piedmont Health Sciences Campus — Outpatient Wing

A label has three seconds to work and no room for nuance. In a healthcare environment those constraints are tighter, the reader may be anxious, medicated, or managing a family member in distress. The label has to work for them anyway. The design principle is simple: make the correct behavior easier than the incorrect one before the decision is processed consciously.

LABEL SYSTEM DESIGN STANDARDS

1. Color coding before text. Each waste stream has a dedicated color. The color is the primary identification signal; the text confirms it.
2. Icon before word. A patient who cannot read the label can sort correctly from the icon.
3. Maximum five items listed per bin. More creates hesitation. A QR code handles the rest.
4. No negative framing on patient-facing labels. 'Recycling only' outperforms 'No medical waste' in healthcare contexts.
5. Consistent placement across all stations , top-center of every bin opening throughout the facility. Consistency builds spatial memory.

<p>WELL Materials — X05: Waste Management</p>	<p><i>WELL credits waste management programs that include occupant-facing education and clearly labeled waste streams. The label system directly supports this credit with documented design standards and placement protocols.</i></p>
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DELIVERABLE 4 — EMAIL NEWSLETTER

Campus: Clearwater Technology Park — All-Employee Distribution

The Carbon Brief has three sections, defined word counts, and a consistent structure that never changes. The structure is the product. Once readers know the format, they know where to find the information relevant to them.

Section 1 — Operational Update	One metric, current performance, direction of travel, one sentence of context. Maximum 80 words. For the employee who has 45 seconds.
Section 2 — Initiative Spotlight	One specific initiative, 150 words, one photograph. Informative and specific , no jargon, written for an intelligent non-specialist.
Section 3 — Employee Spotlight	One person, one role, one specific thing they do. 100 words and a headshot. Consistently the most-read, most-forwarded section.

3.4x	Higher employee sustainability engagement in organizations that feature peer spotlights in internal communications versus those that communicate only operational metrics (Gallup Workplace, 2022).
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The employee who sees their colleague in the newsletter and thinks 'I do that too, I wonder if they'd feature me' has just become a sustainability program advocate. That is worth more than any poster campaign.

DELIVERABLE 5 — DATA INFOGRAPHIC

Campus: Piedmont University — Annual Report Supplement

The water cycle infographic does four jobs simultaneously: satisfies the board's accountability needs, provides a shareable asset for prospective student communications, supports LEED and SITES certification documentation, and gives the communications team a LinkedIn-ready visual. A single panel showing the campus water cycle from source to discharge across five nodes , each with annual volume, year-over-year change, and target.

INFOGRAPHIC DESIGN DECISIONS

1. Flow diagram, not bar chart. The water cycle has physical logic. The infographic follows that sequence.
2. Peer comparison as the headline metric. Piedmont at 18 gallons/SF vs. sector median of 22. Context that a standalone number cannot provide.
3. Certification credit callout integrated into the design , not a footnote, part of the story.
4. Download and share prompt with QR code linking to the full methodology document.

SITES v2

Water — Credits
3.1–3.4

SITES requires documentation of on-site water management performance. A designed infographic that visualizes this data in a publicly accessible format supports documentation requirements while serving the communications goal simultaneously.

DELIVERABLE 6 — CAMPAIGN LANDING PAGE

Campus: Clearwater Technology Park — Net Zero 2035 Internal Campaign

The campaign landing page is the digital anchor for any initiative that extends beyond a single communication moment. It is where the QR code on the poster goes. It is where the newsletter links. It is not a sustainability report made web-friendly , it is a behavior change tool organized around the visitor's level of engagement, with a clear action available at every entry depth.

LANDING PAGE STRUCTURE

1. Above the fold: one headline metric, one progress bar, one immediate action. Readable without scrolling.
2. Initiative grid: six initiatives, each with one-sentence description and current status. Scannable in 90 seconds.
3. Role-based actions: 'I work in operations / in an office / in facilities' , filters the page to show the actions most relevant to that employee's role.
4. Progress timeline: the 2035 commitment in annual milestones, completed and upcoming.
5. Resources and downloads: certification documentation and methodology , for the audience that needs it, not in the way of the audience that doesn't.

DELIVERABLE 7 — SOCIAL MEDIA CONTENT SET

Campus: Piedmont University — LinkedIn and Instagram

Social content fails in two predictable ways: the stock-photo announcement post (zero engagement) and the metric dump nobody reads past the second statistic. Both mistakes come from treating social media as a broadcast channel rather than a conversation channel. The content that earns engagement is specific, features people, and has a point of view.

Post Type 1 — The Number	One surprising metric. One sentence of context. One implication. Link goes to the campaign landing page.
Post Type 2 — The Person	One staff member or student. One specific thing they do. First-person quote, face in the image. Consistently highest engagement.
Post Type 3 — The Milestone	Certification achieved, target reached, award received. Factual and specific. Actual project photography, not stock imagery.
Post Type 4 — The Question	One genuine question. Generates both engagement metrics and real research for the next campaign.

DELIVERABLE 8 — SUSTAINABILITY REPORT ONE-PAGER

Campus: All Three Campuses — Board, Accreditation, ESG Disclosure

The sustainability one-pager is the highest-stakes document in the toolkit. It goes to audiences who control budget, accreditation status, and institutional reputation. It is one page. This constraint should be respected rather than worked around. The discipline of one page forces the editorial decisions that make the document useful.

ONE-PAGER CONTENT ARCHITECTURE

1. Header: institution name, reporting year, and the single most significant sustainability achievement. Not a list, one.
2. Metrics table: six to eight key metrics with current value, prior year, and target. No more than eight rows.
3. Certification status: active certifications with level and year. Certifications in progress with expected completion.
4. Commitments and progress: defined goals with current status against each.
5. Third-party recognition: awards and external validation from the reporting year.
6. Contact and methodology: where to find the full report. Not optional.

SECTION SUMMARY

- Each deliverable is built from a completed campaign brief. Audience, goal, channel, and success metric are defined before design begins.
- The sustainability dashboard is infrastructure, not a campaign. It exists before campaigns launch and persists after they end.
- Behavior change poster design addresses uncertainty, not apathy. Most incorrect sorting results from unclear point-of-decision communication.
- QR code integration connects physical deliverables to live digital resources , enabling different depths of engagement from the same touchpoint.
- Employee and student spotlights consistently outperform metric-only communications. Feature people doing the work.
- The one-pager is the highest-stakes document in the toolkit. One page. Editorial discipline. The constraint is the feature, not the limitation.

Build What You Can Sustain

A phased rollout framework for programs of every size.

The most common failure mode in sustainability communications is not bad design. It is overreach. A program that launches eight deliverables simultaneously, maintains none of them consistently, and burns out its coordinator by March is not a communications program, it is a sprint followed by a silence that is worse than doing nothing.

Each phase below builds infrastructure before it builds campaigns. Each campaign is sized to what the team can maintain at the cadence required, not what looks most impressive at launch.

Phase One — Baseline and Infrastructure (Months 1–3)

Phase One does not produce visible output. It produces the foundation that makes all subsequent output trustworthy, consistent, and maintainable.

Audience Map	Complete the audience mapping exercise. Name every distinct population, their behavior change relevance, their primary motivation, and their effective channels.
Sustainability Dashboard	Build the dashboard before any campaign launches. Campaigns without a dashboard have no accountability mechanism.
Campaign Brief Template	Establish the template and the approval process. Every campaign must have a completed brief before design begins.
Photography & Asset Audit	Inventory existing sustainability-related photography and visual assets. Most programs have more than they realize, and most of it is disorganized.
Certification Credit Mapping	Map the communication deliverables to the specific certification credits they support. If pursuing WELL, LEED O+M, or Fitwel, the communications work is certification documentation work.

Phase Two — First Campaign (Months 3–6)

Launch one campaign, not the most ambitious one, but the one with the clearest behavior change goal and the most measurable baseline. A residence hall waste diversion campaign is a

better first campaign than a campus-wide carbon awareness initiative because the audience is bounded, the behavior is specific, and the result is measurable.

FIRST CAMPAIGN SELECTION CRITERIA
1. The behavior change can be observed and measured within the campaign timeline. If you cannot measure it, choose a different campaign.
2. The audience is bounded and reachable through a defined channel. A campaign for 400 students in one residence hall cluster is a first campaign. A campaign for 18,000 students is not.
3. The operations team is ready. A composting campaign fails if the compost bins are not in place, labeled correctly, and emptied on schedule.
4. A baseline exists. Without it, the campaign cannot demonstrate impact to the stakeholders who fund the next one.

Measure the first campaign rigorously. The discipline of measuring creates the feedback loop that improves every subsequent campaign. The documentation of what worked and what didn't is more valuable than the campaign result itself.

Phase Three — Expand and Systematize (Months 6–12)

Use the learnings from the first campaign to build the second and begin systematizing production. Systematization means templates, not constraints on creativity, but scaffolding that eliminates decisions that don't need to be made from scratch every time. A poster template family. A newsletter template with locked section structure. A project sheet template the operations team can complete without involving the communications team.

Templates handle production. The coordinator's judgment handles strategy. The capacity freed by templates is capacity for the work that actually requires thinking.

Phase Four — Reporting and Iteration (Ongoing)

Close the loop between operational performance data and communications output. When the waste diversion rate goes up, the newsletter covers it with the specific number and what caused it. When it stalls, the communications team asks the operations team what changed.

Quarterly Review Agenda	Dashboard performance (30 min). Campaign results vs. baselines (20 min). Campaign library update (10 min). Next quarter planning (30 min). Total: 90 minutes.
Annual Communications Audit	Full review of all active deliverables. Which are current. Which are outdated. Which certifications require updated documentation.

SECTION SUMMARY

- Durability beats ambition. Three deliverables maintained consistently over two years outperforms eight deliverables maintained by none.
 - Phase One builds infrastructure before any visible output is produced. No campaigns until the audience map and dashboard exist.
 - First campaigns need bounded audiences, specific goals, measurable baselines, and confirmed operational readiness.
 - Templates systematize production and create capacity for strategic work. Design once, use indefinitely.
 - The quarterly review closes the loop between operations data and campaign strategy. Communication and operations are not separate programs.
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The Communications Work Is the Certification Work

How the deliverables in this playbook map to specific credits across LEED, WELL, Fitwel, SITES, and BREEAM.

Most campus sustainability teams treat certification documentation and sustainability communications as separate workstreams. The certification team produces evidence packages. The communications team produces posters and newsletters. The two teams rarely coordinate and the work is often duplicated.

They are not separate workstreams. They are the same work approached from different angles. Several credits across all five major frameworks specifically require evidence of occupant engagement, behavior change programming, and sustainability communications. A well-structured communications program generates exactly this evidence as a byproduct of doing the communications work well.

LEED CREDITS SUPPORTED

<p>LEED O+M SS-p Site Management Policy</p>	<p><i>A documented communications program with defined audience targets and measurable behavior change goals constitutes evidence of an active site management policy with occupant engagement as a defined component.</i></p>
<p>LEED O+M EQ-p Green Cleaning Policy</p>	<p><i>The label system and wayfinding deliverables provide occupant-facing communication about waste stream segregation, supporting the occupant education component of this prerequisite.</i></p>
<p>LEED BD+C Innovation — Pilot Credits</p>	<p><i>Pilot credits for occupant engagement and behavior change programs are increasingly adopted. The campaign framework and dashboard provide the documentation structure these credits require.</i></p>

WELL CREDITS SUPPORTED

<p>WELL v2 Mind — M07: Occupant Survey</p>	<p><i>WELL requires documented evidence that occupants have been engaged with building health and wellness features. A structured communications program with audience mapping and campaign measurement records provides this evidence with minimal additional documentation burden.</i></p>
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<p>WELL v2 Community — C04: Community Resilience</p>	<p><i>The campaign landing page and sustainability goals dashboard provide the community resilience communication infrastructure WELL credits , specifically transparent performance reporting, and occupant resource provision.</i></p>
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FITWEL, SITES, AND BREEAM CREDITS SUPPORTED

<p>Fitwel Health Communications</p>	<p><i>Requires evidence of a health communications plan with defined audiences, channels, and documented distribution. The campaign brief template and campaign library are exactly this documentation.</i></p>
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<p>SITES v2 Human Health & Wellbeing — Credit 8.1</p>	<p><i>SITES credits publicly accessible information about site sustainability features. The sustainability dashboard and infographic serve this credit when published publicly rather than restricted to internal audiences.</i></p>
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<p>BREEAM Management — Man 04: Stakeholder Participation</p>	<p><i>Requires evidence of structured stakeholder engagement throughout occupancy , including occupant-facing communications about sustainability features and performance.</i></p>
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THE COORDINATION PROTOCOL

A standing monthly coordination meeting between the sustainability communications lead and the certification documentation lead , 30 minutes, one agenda item: which communications deliverables produced this month generate certification evidence, and is that evidence being captured in the format the certifier requires.

Most certifiers require specific formats: photographs with dates, survey results with sample sizes, distribution records with reach data. The communications work generates all this naturally. The coordination meeting ensures it is captured rather than discarded as internal working material.

SECTION SUMMARY

- Sustainability communications and certification documentation are not separate workstreams. A structured program generates certification evidence as a byproduct of doing the communications work well.
 - WELL, Fitwel, LEED O+M, SITES, and BREEAM credits all directly reward structured communications programs with documented audience targeting and measurable outcomes.
 - A 30-minute monthly coordination meeting between communications and certification teams captures outputs as evidence before they are discarded as working material.
 - Publishing sustainability performance data publicly , rather than restricting it to internal audiences , activates SITES and BREEAM credits that internal-only communications cannot support.
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Three Campuses. Three Communication Challenges.

The fictional context behind every sample in this playbook, and the communication decisions each one required.

Every sample in this playbook exists in a specific context. This section makes that context explicit, not because fictional campus details matter in themselves, but because context is what drove the communication decisions. Use these profiles as a template for the context document your own campus needs before designing any deliverable.

Piedmont University — Main Campus

Size	18,000 students, 220-acre main campus, Research Triangle, NC
Certifications	LEED Gold, Student Union (2022). SITES Silver, East Quad (2023). STARS Silver (2023).
Primary Goal	75% waste diversion rate (current: 64%). Energy use intensity 80 kBtu/sf (current: 87).
Communication Challenge	Waste diversion stalled at 64% for 18 months. Operations are correct. The gap is behavioral, contamination at the tray return in Morrison Dining Hall.
Budget	\$28,000 annual. No dedicated design staff, all design outsourced or produced with Canva.

Every Piedmont University sample is designed within a small team and limited budget. None requires professional design software or an agency. The poster template is production-ready in Canva. The dashboard is an HTML page maintainable with basic web skills.

Piedmont Health Sciences Campus

Size	400-bed teaching hospital, 6 outpatient clinics
Certifications in Progress	WELL Core Silver, New Patient Tower (2025). TRUE Zero Waste, Main Campus.

Primary Goal	TRUE Zero Waste certification (current: 71%, target: 90%).
Communication Challenge	Patient and visitor waste sorting accuracy in public areas is 41%, well below the 85% required. Clinical staff are at 88%. The gap is entirely in public-facing stations.
Budget	\$45,000 annual. Access to hospital marketing team for design support on priority projects.

The healthcare campus context introduces constraints the university campus does not have. Patients may be anxious, medicated, or managing a family member in distress. The communication has 90 seconds. The label system is designed under those constraints, visual first, text minimal, correct behavior made easier than incorrect by the physical design of the waste station itself.

Clearwater Technology Park

Size	85-acre corporate campus, 6 buildings, 3,200 employees, suburban Durham, NC
Certifications	LEED Gold — Buildings A and B. Fitwel — Building C. WELL v2 and LEED O+M in progress.
Primary Goal	Net zero carbon by 2035. 40% reduction in single-use plastic. EV charging for 25% of spaces by 2026.
Communication Challenge	Net zero commitment announced January 2024. By April, 31% of employees could name a single sustainability initiative. The program exists operationally. Communicatively, it is invisible.
Budget	\$60,000 annual. Access to corporate design team. Social media managed by corporate communications.

The campus that communicates sustainability well is not the one with the biggest budget. It is the one that knows its audience well enough to design for them specifically.

The Language of Sustainable Campus Communications

These are working definitions, the meaning these terms carry in the context of building and running a campus sustainability communications program. Not academic definitions. The vocabulary you need to speak precisely with sustainability coordinators, communications teams, certification bodies, and institutional leadership.

Audience Map	A structured document naming each distinct population, their behavior change role, their motivation profile, and the channels that reach them. The first deliverable every program should produce.
Behavior Brief	[Audience] will [action] in [context] by [date]. One sentence. The brief all designers and writers work from.
Campaign Brief	One page connecting audience, goal, baseline, metric, message, channel, and timeline. Required before any design begins.
Baseline	Current measured state of the behavior being changed. Without it, impact cannot be demonstrated.
Campaign Library	A maintained archive of all campaigns — brief, deliverables, results, and learnings. Institutional memory.
Channel	The medium through which communication reaches its intended audience. Channel selection is one of the most consequential decisions in campaign planning.
Contamination Rate	Percentage of items placed in a waste stream that do not belong there. The metric most directly affected by waste stream communications.
Default Setting	A design choice that makes the correct behavior the easiest option. The most effective behavior change intervention in high-volume, low-attention contexts.
Diversion Rate	Percentage of waste diverted from landfills through recycling, composting, or donation. TRUE Zero Waste certification targets 90% or above.

Occupant Engagement	Documented evidence that building users have been informed about and engaged with sustainability features. Required by WELL, Fitwel, and BREEAM credits.
Peer Norm Messaging	Using data about what comparable peers are already doing to motivate the target behavior. More effective than instructional or aspirational messaging in most campus contexts.
Point of Decision	The physical location where a behavior choice is made , the waste station, the thermostat, the cafeteria tray return. The most effective location for behavior change signage.
QR Code Integration	Connecting a physical deliverable to a digital resource through a scannable code. Allows physical materials to link to live data and updated resources without reprint cycles.
Sustainability Dashboard	A digital display of performance metrics against targets, updated on defined cadences. The anchor of the communications program.
TRUE Zero Waste	A GBCI zero waste certification requiring 90% or above diversion from landfill. Communication and labeling programs are required certification components.
Wayfinding	The system of signs, labels, and environmental cues that guides people to correct decisions at choice points.

THE CERTIFICATION FRAMEWORKS AT A GLANCE

LEED	Most widely adopted globally. Covers energy, water, site, materials, and IEQ. LEED O+M is most relevant for existing campus buildings pursuing ongoing sustainability performance certification.
WELL	Most health-science-grounded. Ten concepts including Air, Water, Nourishment, Light, Movement, and Mind. The most directly relevant framework for communications programs because several credits explicitly require occupant engagement documentation.
Fitwel	Developed by the CDC and GSA. Most accessible and cost-effective. The health communications credit is among the most directly rewarded by a structured campus communications program.

SITES v2	Landscape and site counterpart to LEED and WELL. Most relevant for programs with significant outdoor scope. Credits for performance monitoring communication and equitable access are directly supported by public-facing dashboard and infographic deliverables.
BREEAM	Dominant standard outside North America. Stakeholder participation credits are among the most directly relevant to communications programs in international institutional contexts.

Start. Build. Sustain.

What you know now. How to move from playbook to program.

This playbook covered a lot of ground.

Strategy before tactics. Audience maps and behavior briefs before poster designs. Eight deliverable formats across three campus types. A phased implementation framework. Certification credit alignment across five frameworks. Key concepts and vocabulary for the conversations that happen at the intersection of communications, sustainability, and facilities.

Here is what it all comes down to.

Your campus has a sustainability story. People are not hearing it. The gap is not the story — the story is real, the work is real, the data is real. The gap is the infrastructure that translates what the sustainability office knows into what the campus community understands and does.

That infrastructure is buildable. Not all at once. Not with a large team or a large budget. One campaign, one audience, one behavior change goal at a time. The campuses that communicate sustainability best did not launch comprehensive programs. They launched one thing that worked. Then another. Then another. The compounding is gradual and then it is visible.

The sustainability program that runs quietly and well is not failing at communications. It is choosing not to do it yet. This playbook is for when you are ready to choose differently.

BEFORE YOU CLOSE THIS DOCUMENT

Three things worth doing before the momentum of reading fades into the momentum of the inbox.

Name one audience.

Not the campus community. One specific population whose behavior change would make the most meaningful difference to your highest-priority sustainability goal. Write it down. That population is your first campaign audience.

Write one behavior brief.

Using the format from Part One: [Audience] will [action] in [context] by [date]. One sentence. Specific. Observable. If you cannot write it in one sentence, the goal is not yet specific enough. Make it specific enough.

Identify the baseline.

What is the current state of that behavior or metric? If you do not know, finding out is the first action. Without a baseline, nothing that follows can be measured. Find it before you design anything.

KEY CONCEPTS — QUICK REFERENCE

Audience Map	Each campus population, their sustainability role, their motivation, and their effective channels. The first deliverable every program should produce.
Behavior Brief	[Audience] will [action] in [context] by [date]. One sentence. The brief all designers and writers work from.
Campaign Brief	One page: audience, goal, baseline, metric, message, channel, timeline. Required before any design begins.
Baseline	Current measured state of the behavior being changed. Without it, impact cannot be demonstrated.
Point of Decision	Where the behavior choice is made. The most effective location for behavior change signage.
Default Setting	Making the correct behavior the easiest option. The most effective intervention in high-volume contexts.
Peer Norm Messaging	Using data about what comparable peers are doing to motivate behavior change. More effective than instructional messaging.
QR Code Integration	Connecting physical deliverables to live digital resources without reprint cycles.
Sustainability Dashboard	Live performance metrics against defined targets. Exists before campaigns, persists after them.
Occupant Engagement	Documented evidence that building users have been engaged with sustainability features. Required by WELL, Fitwel, and BREEAM.
Campaign Library	Maintained archive of all campaigns — brief, deliverables, results, learnings. Institutional memory.
Certification Alignment	Communications work as certification evidence. The same effort serves two purposes when coordinated deliberately.

The campuses that communicate sustainability well did not get there through superior resources. They got there because someone decided that the operational work deserved to be heard, and built the infrastructure to make it heard consistently.

That decision is available to every campus. This playbook is how you make it.

E n d o f P l a y b o o k