

Sustainability Officer's Guide to Climate Action on Campus

This little resource guide is seeking to provide a bit of important context for faculty and other higher ed professionals seeking to organize for climate action on their campus. Highlighting the role of some key players, it provides insight into your levers of power to demand climate action in your community.

Caroline Burkholder
Sustainability Manager
Temple University
Office of Sustainability
caroline.burkholder@temple.edu
Sustainability.temple.edu

Why? Understanding the Climate Action Mandate



[Second Nature](#) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1993. They work with over 4,00 administrators and faculty to “help make the principles of sustainability fundamental to every aspect of higher education.”

Why does this matter to you?

Second Nature administers a number of programs that instigate climate action in higher ed, including the [Presidential Climate Commitment](#) which pretty nicely summarizes their strategy and requires participating (dues paying) institutions to:

- Complete an emission inventory
- Target date and interim milestones for carbon neutrality
- Take immediate steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by choosing from a list of short-term actions
- Integrate sustainability into the curriculum and make it part of the educational experience
- Make the action plan, inventory and progress reports publicly available

In many cases, this public administrative commitment is what jumpstarts local, university-level climate action planning and is an important lever of power in faculty and academic leadership organizing for accountability. Depending on your individual institution’s politics, it could be what motivated the establishment of your Office of Sustainability.

Second Nature’s Mission

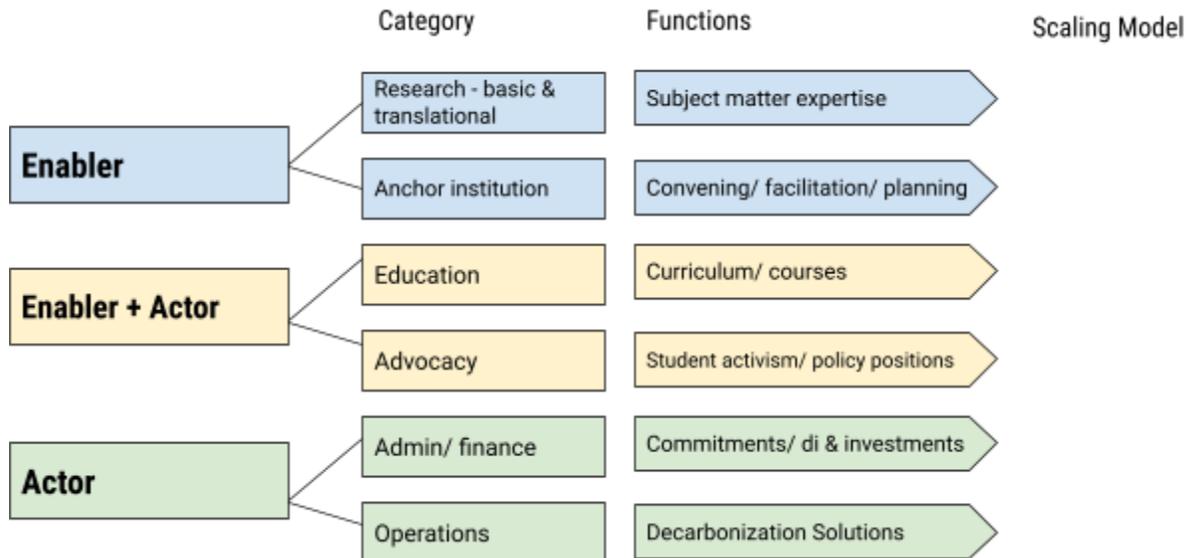
Second Nature is committed to accelerating climate action in, and through, higher education.

Second Nature’s Vision

We see the higher education sector nurturing this future by applying its distinct strengths in teaching, research, and service towards society’s greater good.

How? Higher Education Sector as a Climate Accelerator

Second Nature mobilizes a diverse array of higher education institutions to act on bold climate commitments, scales those resultant campus climate initiatives, and thus, creates innovative climate solutions. Then, aligns, amplifies and bridges the Higher Ed sector’s efforts with other global leaders (in industry and policy). It looks something like this:



HOW? Measuring Impact & Organizing for Accountability



[The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education](https://www.aashe.org/)

Mission To inspire and catalyze higher education to lead the global sustainability transformation.

Vision AASHE will lead higher education to be a foundation for a thriving, equitable and ecologically healthy world.

AASHE is the leading association for the advancement of sustainability in higher education. They serve a full range of higher education faculty, administrators, staff and students who are change agents and drivers of sustainability innovation. Established in 2005, AASHE has over 900 members across 48 U.S. states, 1 U.S. Territory, 9 Canadian provinces and 20 countries.

Why does this matter to you?

The Sustainability Tracking, Assessment & Rating System ([STARS](#)) is a transparent, self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to measure their sustainability performance. This is one of the only tools for us to operationalize the goals of a Climate Action Plan. STARS is a blueprint of sorts & AASHE helps define the landscape and intersections of higher education policy and practice. It provides a valuable learning network with your institutional comps and establishes governance and professional standards via best practice sharing and baseline data.

Most importantly for you, STARS & Climate Action Planning processes and active committees are an organizing tool to engage students, staff, faculty members, and administrators in building a culture of sustainability on campus via:

- A framework to help integrate sustainability into your institution's planning and development efforts
- Resources to identify best practices that you can implement locally
- Methods for integrating sustainability principles and climate literacy into curricula and research activities

Grounding our work locally: Connecting Climate Justice to the Urban Mission

I thought it might be helpful to provide more insight into one university's recalibration of climate action planning to more appropriately respond to climate justice and social movement making.

Our Urban Mission:

As an urban institution that is deeply engaged in the community, Temple University's commitment to sustainability can have a profound impact on the health and quality of life of a large and diverse population within Temple and its surrounding community. The university is positioned to be an important educational resource for teaching sustainability, with its three pillars of environment, economics and social justice. It is committed to demonstrating the value of those principles through its own example and through the activities it sponsors in the community. Temple aims to serve as a model for similar urban institutions and to burnish its national reputation for excellence and commitment to principled policy and action.

Guiding Questions

As a large public urban institution which recognizes its "*profound impact on the health and quality of life of a large and diverse population within Temple and its surrounding community,*" what does "principled policy and action" look like?

What does a racially, socially and environmentally just university look like?
How are we preparing students to graduate with the end of the world in mind?
How are we adapting to honor and center their climate anxieties and righteous anger?

Perhaps more an exercise in expanding the political imagination, participating actively in creating an institutional culture committed to hyperlocal community engagement and just policy? What does that policy look like -- Land back? Community solar? Green space? Extreme heat and utility relief?

How can we as institutional subject matter experts, coalition builders and thought leaders lead our peers locally, regionally, nationally and globally to climate action?

Caroline's Tips:

- ❑ Meeting people where they are at,
- ❑ keeping the focus on making measurable change in community (via relationship-based organizing)
- ❑ a scope and scale reflective of your relative power *i.e. what is your locus of control? a classroom, a department office space, your personal travel, diet, an event you organize, your faith community, faculty senate, graduate student workers union*