



NORTHERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY

# GREEN VISION 2030







## DEAR CAMPUS COMMUNITY,

I am pleased to present Northern Kentucky University's new sustainability strategy: **Green Vision 2030**.

Across the globe, we are frequently seeing the devastating effects of climate change on the environment and communities. Floods, hurricanes, droughts, fires – they are happening with more frequency and more intensity. Biodiversity loss is at an all-time high. The ocean is becoming increasingly more acidic. The climate disasters are real, but the hope and opportunities are real, as well. Many higher education organizations are taking action toward reducing their carbon footprint; NKU is among these proactive institutions working to achieve a more sustainable campus. This Green Vision 2030 strategy includes ambitious objectives to reduce campus waste, enhance the greenery of our grounds, better prepare students academically and professionally for the increasing demand for green knowledge and skills, and improve overall support for sustainability initiatives on campus. This strategy builds upon previous campus plans that have helped guide the university toward our committed goal of climate neutrality by 2050. The Green Vision 2030 includes a combination of goals from these prior plans and new goals that have been created around the sustainability needs of our university today. This strategy is not meant to encompass all aspects of sustainability, but rather to strategically focus on goals relevant to our institution that are within our ability to achieve by 2030.

Making progress on our university's climate commitment is more important than ever. The turn of the decade – 2030 – is the globally recognized deadline for preventing irreversible environmental damage. Our Green Vision 2030 strategy aligns with international efforts to tackle the many causes of climate change in the six short years before this deadline. We do this for our students and our employees. We do this for our community. We do this for our planet. But most of all, we do this because it needs to be done, in order to create a healthier, more equitable world. As the phrase goes, there is no Planet B.

Let's get to work.

**Tiffany Budd**

*Sustainability Operations Coordinator  
Chair, Green Vision 2030 Workgroup*





## INTRODUCTION

Northern Kentucky University's Green Vision 2030 is a framework and living document that will help guide the university's actions in achieving our campus goal of climate neutrality by 2050. As an institution of higher education, we have an obligation to help mitigate climate change by meeting or exceeding our sustainability goals and contributing to a healthier planet for everyone.

**"THE THINGS OF NATURE DO NOT REALLY BELONG TO US.  
WE SHOULD LEAVE THEM TO OUR CHILDREN AS WE HAVE  
RECEIVED THEM." -OSCAR WILDE**

## VISION

NKU acknowledges that the natural environment is not a separate entity and must be considered in all university matters, large and small, local and international, as an interconnected component of student success. NKU's vision is to lead, inspire, and drive transformative change towards a sustainable future for our campus and beyond.

## MISSION

NKU's mission is to be a model of sustainability, where every action aligns with our values of environmental responsibility, social equity, and economic resilience. By achieving the goals in this strategy, we will reduce our campus emissions, increase natural habitats and biodiversity, promote healthy food systems and wellness, and bring education and nature together to foster a sustainable and just world where current and future students will succeed as responsible global citizens.

## SUSTAINABILITY DEFINITION

Sustainability is the practice of shared stewardship of resources, both natural and human-made, to create and maintain healthful, equitable, livable, and responsible communities both locally and globally. Environmental sustainability is the responsibility of all members of the campus community and is fundamental to the University's mission of education, engagement, and career-readiness.





**"YOU CANNOT GET THROUGH A SINGLE DAY WITHOUT HAVING AN IMPACT ON THE WORLD AROUND YOU." –JANE GOODALL**

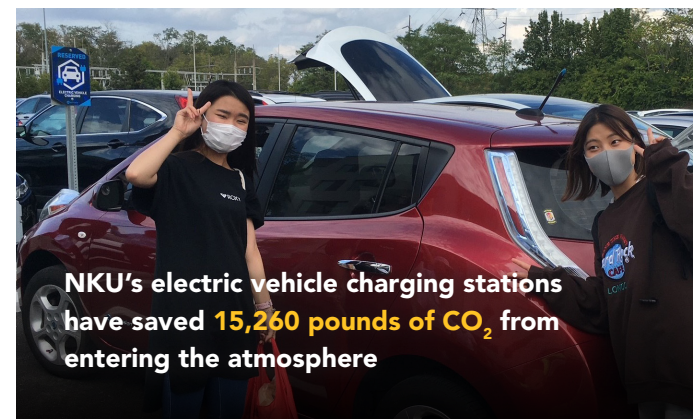
## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SUSTAINABILITY

While environmental conservation initiatives have existed in various forms for hundreds of years, the Industrial Revolution is commonly viewed as the catalyst that sparked a deeper inquiry into just how much impact humans were having on the climate. Decades of research continued to produce data that indicated human-caused climate change. As this data became more widespread in the mid-20th Century, the general public began to take notice and started advocating for and acting on environmental protection.

The first Earth Day celebrations took place on April 22, 1970 and approximately 20 million people across the United States participated. Later that year, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) was founded and, soon after, the Clean Air and Clean Water Acts were signed into law.<sup>1</sup>

During the 1980's, the connection between sustainability and the environment was established as we know it today. In 1987, during the World Commission on Environment and Development, a sub-organization of the United Nations, known as the Brundtland Commission, released a report which brought global attention to the concept of "sustainable development." Sustainable development was defined as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." This definition helped popularize the term "sustainability" in public discourse about environmental issues.<sup>2</sup>

During the 1990's and beyond, a variety of international conferences took place which focused particularly on environmental concerns. Some of the most notable conferences include: the Rio de Janeiro Earth Summit in 1992; the first UN Climate Change Conference (known commonly as COP) in 1995; the Kyoto Protocol in 1997;



the Millennium Summit in 2000; the Rio20+ Conference in 2012; the Paris Agreement in 2015; and the UN General Assembly in New York, also in 2015, where the Sustainable Development Goals were adopted. There have been many other important conferences on the topic of environmental sustainability, such as the most recent COP 28, and the number of conferences and events continues to grow each year.<sup>3</sup>

1. <https://www.loc.gov/item/today-in-history/april-22/#:~:text=Earth%20Day%20was%20first%20observed,sites%20across%20the%20United%20States>
2. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland\\_Commission#Definition\\_of\\_sustainable\\_development](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Brundtland_Commission#Definition_of_sustainable_development)
3. <https://youmatter.world/en/definition/definitions-world-conferences-sustainable-development/>

## SUSTAINABILITY AT NKU

In the late 1970s, a group of faculty and staff formed an Environmental Impact Committee through which they advocated for the preservation of natural areas on NKU's campus. To this day, students, faculty, and staff continue to demonstrate their passion for sustainability through various outlets.



In 2007, NKU became a signatory of the American College and University Presidents' Climate Commitment (now known as the Presidents' Climate Leadership Commitment). As a result, the University committed to being climate neutral by 2050. Subsequently, the University created a Climate Action Plan which was published in 2010 and provided a detailed overview of the University's carbon footprint. This was the university's sustainability plan until 2017 when a Strategic Planning Committee comprised of faculty and staff drafted a new strategy and created a comprehensive definition of sustainability as it applies specifically to our institution. This strategy was set to be a five-year guiding document for building and enhancing the sustainability of our campus community. In 2023, a new workgroup convened and started drafting what is now the current university sustainability strategy: Green Vision 2030. Recognizing that this is the pivotal decade in which to act on climate change, the Green Vision 2030 includes aggressive but realistic sustainability goals and actionable items in which to achieve these goals.





NKU Sustainability collaborated with FUEL, NKU's food pantry, to start a composting service that diverted over **4,800 pounds of food waste** from landfill in the first 1.5 years



NKU reduced energy consumption by **19.5%** from 2018-2023



Each member of our campus community has a role to play in the University's efforts to build and operate an institution that positively impacts the vitality of our community and planet. NKU's Green Vision 2030 strategy is intended to act as a roadmap to unify and guide campus sustainability efforts to 2030 and help pave the way for future actions toward Climate Neutrality by 2050.

The NKU Green Vision 2030 strategy is intended to be a living document. As we move forward to 2050 and beyond, the University will change, technologies will advance and new opportunities will emerge. Therefore, the objectives to reach our goals will continue to evolve. To remain transparent and reflect the needs and strengths of the institution, we expect to formally review and update this strategy as needed every 2-3 years.

## OUR COMMITMENT

At Northern Kentucky University, we promise to put students first, to lead with excellence and to make a lasting impact. With these promises comes the profound responsibility to lead by example as we prepare our students with the knowledge and foresight to be future global leaders who will safeguard our environment.

NKU continues to invest in sustainability through initiatives such as: large-scale energy efficiency projects, LEED-certified buildings, expanding our infrastructure of EV chargers, recycling across the entire campus, student advocacy groups, educational events and workshops on sustainability topics, integration of sustainability education and action into the curriculum, and much more. You can find additional sustainability projects listed in the Timeline on the following pages, as well as on the NKU Sustainability website.



"IN EVERY WALK WITH NATURE ONE RECEIVES FAR MORE THAN HE SEEKS." -JOHN MUIR





**1976**

Northern Kentucky State College is granted university status, thereby becoming Northern Kentucky University

**LATE 1970s**

Faculty and staff create the Environmental Impact Committee to advocate for the preservation of natural greenspaces on the campus grounds

NKU begins to informally collect recyclables such as cardboard and paper

**MID 1990s**

The Animals, Plants, and Earth Society, a student organization now known as the Environmentally Concerned Organization of Students (ECOS), is founded

**1996**

NKU performs a campus-wide lighting retrofit project to reduce energy consumption and cost

**2003**

First official NKU Earth Day celebrations

**2004**

NKU adopts an Energy Savings Performance Contract  
Students lobby for a formal recycling program and NKU begins to collect glass, plastic, books, and other recyclable items

**2007**

NKU enters into an agreement with TANK, thereby allowing anyone with an NKU ID to access local bus routes to and from campus for free

NKU becomes a signatory of the American College and University's Presidents' Climate Commitment and, in doing so, commits to emitting net zero carbon emissions by 2050

**2008**

NKU is the first university to be recognized by the Arbor Day Foundation as a Tree Campus USA

**2009**

The Commonwealth of Kentucky adopts administrative regulations for high performance building standards

NKU Student volunteers complete the University's first greenhouse gas emissions inventory

**2010**

The President's Climate Commitment Task Force publishes the NKU Climate Action Plan

**2015**

A Director of Energy Management and Sustainability Manager are hired

**2017**

Workgroup publishes new Sustainability Strategy

**2019**

NKU creates a new FT staff position for sustainability & utilities – Sustainability Operations Coordinator, which replaces the Director of Energy Management and Sustainability Manager positions

NKU completes an Energy Savings project that will save millions in utility costs and reduce the overall campus carbon footprint

NKU becomes a member of the Cincinnati 2030 District and is the first entity in Kentucky to join the district

**2020**

NKU completes a new master plan that focuses in part on sustainability and energy reduction

**2021**

NKU implements an energy management software to improve utilities management

NKU Sustainability increases electric vehicle charging infrastructure from 1 station to 15 stations across campus

**2022**

NKU Sustainability collaborates with FUEL NKU food pantry to start a composting program to divert thousands of pounds of food waste for the pantry

**2023**

Princeton Review adds NKU to their select list of Green Colleges

A workgroup of faculty, staff and students begins drafting a new campus-wide sustainability strategy: Green Vision 2030

NKU Sustainability partners with the Cincinnati Recycling & Reuse Hub to recycle non-standard items across campus thus diverting even more items from landfill

**2024**

Green Vision 2030 is adopted as NKU's next sustainability strategy





# GOALS

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REDUCE ENERGY CONSUMPTION  
BY 50% BY 2030





# SUPPORT *STUDENT SUCCESS* THROUGH SUSTAINABILITY

	Status Indicator of Implementation can be found at <a href="https://nku.edu/sustainability">nku.edu/sustainability</a>		
	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6+ YEARS
Expand sustainability in the curricula	Create a marker for student transcripts that denotes sustainability-related coursework, internship, or extra-curricular activity	Create Sustainability certificates	Offer a wide range of sustainability classes within each college
	Research projects in sustainability	Create Sustainability modules	
	Incorporate TASK into student learning	Advocate for more sustainability classes across the curricula for all levels of learners	
	Comprehensive list of sustainability-related courses available for students in multiple locations	Advocate for more sustainability study abroad components	
Increase career and internship opportunities	Better prepare students for green jobs	Better prepare students for green jobs	Facilitate internship opportunities both internal and external to NKU
	Facilitate internship opportunities both internal and external to NKU	Facilitate internship opportunities both internal and external to NKU	
Direct experience with sustainability	Create more opportunities for extracurricular activities/service learning in sustainability in the community	Meet with local companies to determine green internship opportunities to learn aspects of their business and as a potential lead for post NKU employment	Seek on-going external sponsors for energy efficiency and sustainability projects
	Integrate sustainability into Orientation programming & Admissions events	Hire student worker(s) who assist with working on energy efficiency rebates, grants, and other projects	
	Paid or volunteer sustainability student ambassadors	Continue to foster external partnerships that provide various opportunities for student engagement	
	Enhance student and faculty collaboration on sustainability projects		



# *EXPAND* THE OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY

	Status Indicator of Implementation can be found at <a href="https://nku.edu/sustainability">nku.edu/sustainability</a>		
	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6+ YEARS
Operations	Apply for small grants to help advance sustainability projects	Apply for larger grants that help advance both sustainability and energy efficiency	Use funding from grants, donors, etc., to further expand sustainability office into a collaborative entity that can help support multiple offices at once
	Expand partnerships to allow for more collaboration and possible funding/ revenue	Create revenue streams to help fund sustainability and energy projects (e.g., student green fee)	
Personnel	Add PT or FT position to sustainability office, or role that supports sustainability	Add 1-2 additional FT sustainability or support roles to further advance strategy and carbon neutral goals	Continue to expand the sustainability office with additional FT/PT roles to further advance strategy and carbon neutral goals
	Provide paid internships for students		
	Create a Sustainability Ambassadors Program for students		
Campus Action	Designate an official Office of Sustainability	Create a university executive level sustainability committee, or include a sustainability representative in existing executive councils	
	Hire an Energy Manager for campus		
	Hire a Waste Management Coordinator for campus		
	Expand community engagement/events	Include sustainability in decision-making at the executive level	
	Build upon existing partnerships		





REDUCE CAMPUS WASTE

	Status Indicator of Implementation can be found at <a href="https://nku.edu/sustainability">nku.edu/sustainability</a>		
	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6+ YEARS
Eliminate single-use plastics	Promote reusable dishes in employee kitchen areas	Phase out 100% of plastic bags on campus	Remove/replace all plastic bottles with more sustainable options in vending machines and dining areas
	Provide reusable cups (minimal refill fee) and cutlery or offer available for purchase		
	Phase out plastic bags at shops and eateries	Create policies about plastic and Styrofoam	
	Phase out plastic straws in select areas and replace others with sustainably made straws	Switch to boxed or aluminum water bottles across campus	
Education and awareness building	On-going communication about proper recycling	Offer Repair Fairs to educate on product longevity	Continue to offer events and workshops to both students and employees on a regular basis
	Enhance reduce and reuse efforts		
	Enhance awareness about surplus shopping	Class/student projects around waste diversion initiatives	
	Expand the supply swap and make it easily accessible	Develop programs to teach K-12 students about recycling and composting	
Campus Action	Complete indoor standardization of trash and recycling bins	Implement post-consumer composting	Reduce campus waste by 70% by 2030
	On-going training for staff servicing trash/ recycling bins		
	Point persons in buildings/colleges/offices for helping reduce waste	Add recycling centers to all parts of campus including the Arena	
	Implement pre-consumer composting		



CREATE MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY CAMPUS GROUNDS

	Status Indicator of Implementation can be found at <a href="https://nku.edu/sustainability">nku.edu/sustainability</a>		
	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6+ YEARS
Environmental consideration of grounds when constructing or renovating	Leave mature trees undisturbed when possible with construction projects	Leave mature trees undisturbed when possible with construction projects	Leave mature trees undisturbed when possible with construction projects
	Add more trees and native plants to new construction project plans	Add more trees and native plants to new construction project plans	Add more trees and native plants to new construction project plans
		Start to implement rain capture options	
	Minimize impervious surface areas	Consider outdoor study/relaxation areas in addition to indoor areas	Maintain 100% organic chemical treatments for campus grounds
	Create a building standard for outdoor landscaping	Evaluate strategic depaving and remove concrete where possible	
Campus Action	Increase rewilding & no-mow zones	Continue adding trees and plants to existing and new landscaping	Continue adding trees and plants to existing and new landscaping
	Add more trees and native plants to existing landscape		
	Add a community garden near the dorms for students	Specific focus on green spaces/wilding that promotes biodiversity	Create separate cycle/cart trails from pedestrian areas
	More signage about environmental features on campus	Participation in projects by incoming/ outgoing students for continuity	
	Designated hammock zone for students	Ensure proper maintenance of existing green infrastructure	Ensure proper maintenance of existing green infrastructure
	Ensure proper maintenance of existing green infrastructure		
		Add bike lanes to all new road redesigns	





# INCREASE *SUSTAINABLE* FOOD OPTIONS ON CAMPUS



# REDUCE ENERGY CONSUMPTION *BY 50%* BY 2030

	Status Indicator of Implementation can be found at <a href="https://nku.edu/sustainability">nku.edu/sustainability</a>		
	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6+ YEARS
Increase advocacy for sustainable food options	Meatless Mondays every week	Farmer's market on campus	Advocate for university investment in supporting local farms
	Smoothie/power bowl options on campus and dorm dining		
	Campaigns at Norse Commons to eat more vegetarian options twice a week or more	Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) program for employees	
Improve education about food in relation to sustainability	More education on healthy food options and nutrition facts	Provide on-going healthy eating education and cooking workshops for both employees and students	Provide on-going healthy eating education and cooking workshops for both employees and students
	Collaborate with Wellness on healthy eating		
	More communication to students about healthy food options at Norse Commons		
	Fliers, posters, events for all Housing students about healthy eating and cooking		
Campus Action	Smaller portion options for smaller price (healthier and more equitable)	Bring a community garden into the center of campus and make it visible	50% or more food options on campus locally grown and organic
	Repackage/donate dining service food leftovers	Provide a fully plant-based dining option	
	Source local, organic food for select dining options	Provide healthy food/smoothie vending machines	100% of fish and meat options sustainably sourced
	More healthy food options for students staying in dorms during summer	50% of all campus food options be plant-based by 2030	

	Status Indicator of Implementation can be found at <a href="https://nku.edu/sustainability">nku.edu/sustainability</a>		
	2-3 YEARS	4-6 YEARS	6+ YEARS
Improve Energy Efficiency	Upgrade all lighting to LED and add sensors where needed	Research heat capture for AC 220 to reduce HVAC costs	Transition buildings to be fully electric where possible
	Plan another ESCO project	Smart thermostats and motion sensors for lights as the standard for all renovated and new spaces	
Renewables	Research grant funding, develop partnerships, etc.	Start planning and implementing solar and wind energy	Continue expanding renewables on campus to meet 50% reduction in energy use goal
	Include geothermal in new Science Center expansion	Include geothermal in all new building construction when possible	Include geothermal in all new building construction when possible
Campus Action	Explore Energy Mapping services for reaching 2050 climate neutral goal	Continue implementing an Energy Strategy/Mapping plan	Continue implementing an Energy Strategy/Mapping plan
	Get specific data on the appliances/ systems that are using the most energy per building	Explore heated sidewalks as energy and labor savings	
	Tie in Occupant Health with energy and building upgrades	Explore solar-powered covered seating areas outdoors	Explore battery storage and/or other alternatives to natural gas and diesel backup generators
	Repurpose designated computer lab spaces to match occupant need and reduce energy consumption		





# THANK YOU!

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