

Building a Credible Sustainability Action Plan

A practical step-by-step guide
for Sports Organisations

BASIS
British Association for Sustainable Sport

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Sport and physical activity depend on healthy environments.

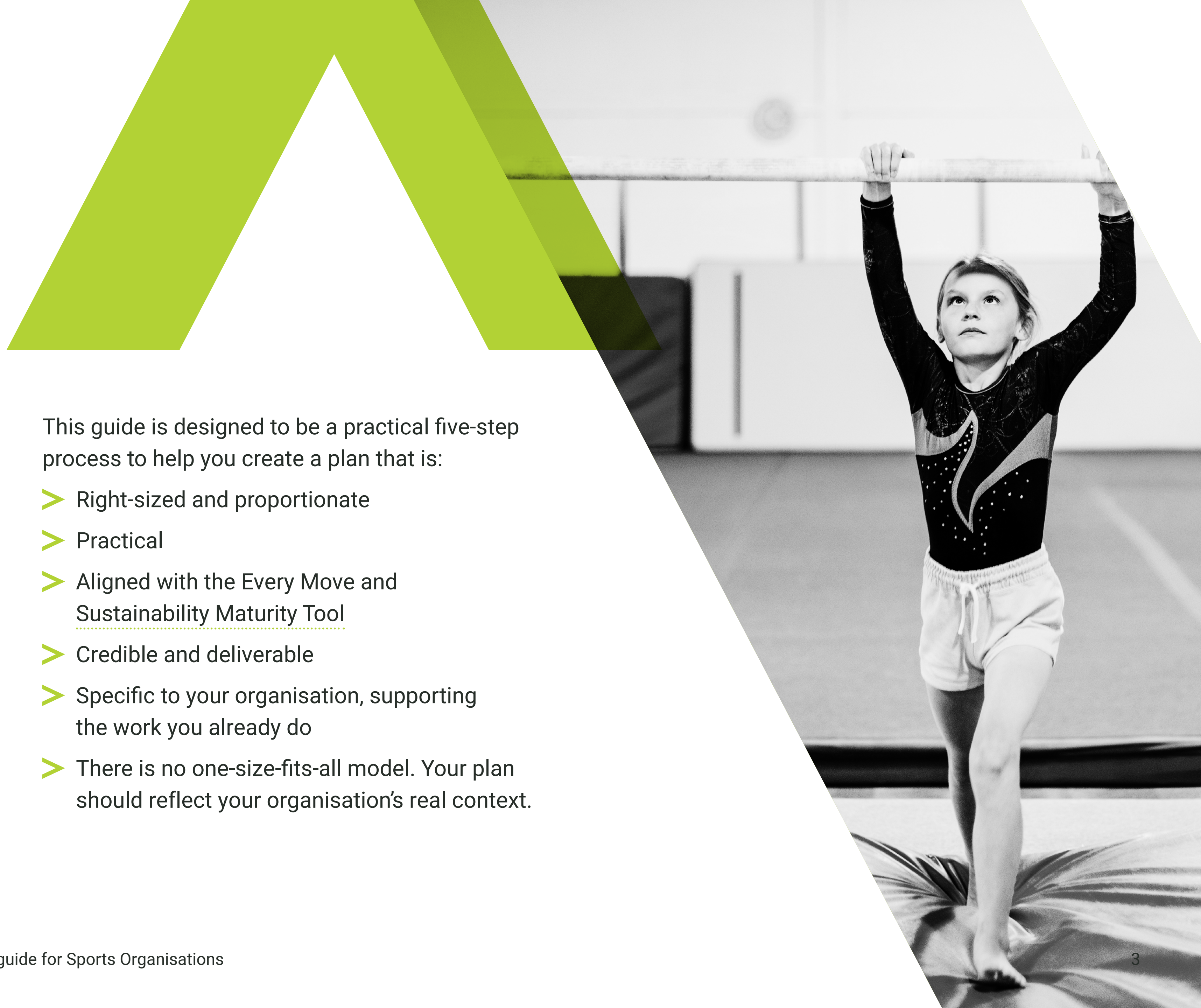
When heatwaves make sport and physical activity harder, participation drops.

When flooding damages facilities, matches are cancelled. Rising energy costs strain budgets.

Poor air and water quality make it harder to get active.

These pressures are felt most by the communities who already face the biggest barriers to participation. At the same time, given its vast cultural power, people increasingly look to sport - from grassroots clubs to national federations - to show leadership and act responsibly.

Sport is exposed to climate impacts and, through its operations, sport contributes to climate change - which is why sustainability has become an increasing priority across the sector. Under Sport England's Every Move strategy, all System Partners are required to have a sustainability action plan in place by March 2027 as a condition for future funding.



This is not simply about compliance. A strong proportionate sustainability action plan can:

- > Enhance efforts to tackle inequalities
- > Reduce waste and operational costs
- > Strengthen reputation and partnerships
- > Increase resilience
- > Engage staff and participants
- > Demonstrate leadership

This is about integrating sustainability into your existing processes and activities. Doing things differently, not simply doing new or different things.

This guide is designed to be a practical five-step process to help you create a plan that is:

- > Right-sized and proportionate
- > Practical
- > Aligned with the Every Move and Sustainability Maturity Tool
- > Credible and deliverable
- > Specific to your organisation, supporting the work you already do
- > There is no one-size-fits-all model. Your plan should reflect your organisation's real context.

What Sport England Requires

By March 2027, System Partners are expected to have:



A clear sustainability action plan



Engaged with Sport England and BASIS support and resources



An understanding of how sustainability supports and is embedded in every day delivery activity

Sport England's Sustainability Maturity Tool provides a framework to help organisations understand how well sustainability is embedded across their organisation - and how to progress over time.

Alongside the headline themes, it helps you assess how well sustainability is led, managed, delivered, measured and communicated across

your organisation. So it is not just about what you are doing, but how consistently and systematically sustainability is integrated into your organisation. It describes stages of progression - from early activity to fully embedded practice - and helps you identify practical next steps (more of that below).

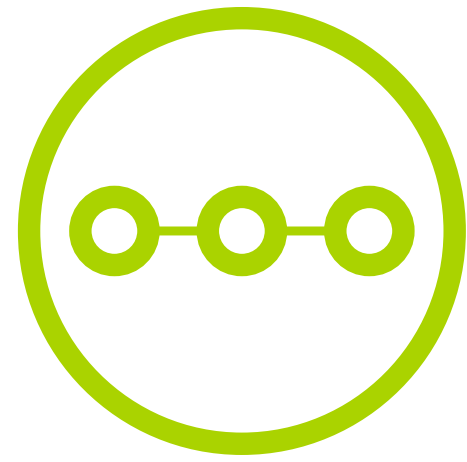
A good action plan for System Partners should show:



Where you are now
(your maturity level)



Where you want to be



What actions will move
you forward



How progress will
be tracked

This is about delivering progress, not achieving perfection.

- > Leadership and strategic commitment
- > Governance and accountability
- > Operational environmental impacts
- > Procurement and supply chain influence
- > Education and engagement
- > Monitoring, measurement and reporting



Our Five-Step Framework

This guide follows a simple five-step framework. The five steps are:

1 >

Define your purpose and values

2 >

Engage stakeholders

3 >

Identify your priority areas

4 >

Plan actions, targets and responsibilities

5

Embed governance and review

Step 1: Define Your Purpose and Values

Before listing actions, be clear on your “why”. A sustainability action plan must connect to your core mission.

Ask:

- > Why does sustainability matter to our organisation?
- > How does it connect to our purpose?
- > How does it support our core activities?
- > What responsibilities do we have?
- > What opportunities does this create?

Example positioning statements from sport

- > “A tennis community that plays its part in protecting the environment (protect where we play).” **Lawn Tennis Association**
- > “Championing sustainability in pools, performance and participation.” **Aquatics GB**
- > “Active Partnerships are committed to proactively working to improve Environmental Sustainability, to help ensure that everyone can lead active lives and enjoy the benefits of sport, physical activity, and movement.”

Your statement does not need to be long. It should be clear, honest, relevant and practical.

Practical exercise

Complete this sentence:

“Sustainability matters to us because...”

Keep it to one or two lines. This will anchor your plan.

Step 2: Engage Your Stakeholders

Sustainability cannot be delivered by one individual acting alone.

It must involve the people who influence and are influenced by your organisation, because effective stakeholder engagement enables buy-in, innovation, greater risk awareness, more credibility, and enhanced accountability.

Typical stakeholders include:

Internal:

- > Board
- > Senior leadership team
- > Staff
- > Volunteers
- > Facilities teams
- > Event teams

External:

- > Clubs
- > Participants
- > Athletes
- > Sponsors
- > Suppliers
- > Facility operators
- > Local authorities
- > Community groups



Simple engagement approach

You may have heard the term **materiality assessment**.

This is a structured process used by larger organisations to identify and prioritise the environmental, social and governance (ESG) issues that matter most to them and their stakeholders. It can be useful, but it can be resource-intensive.

You do not need to undertake a complex materiality assessment at the outset unless you are ready and resourced to do so.

For many organisations, starting simpler is both appropriate and more effective.

A Practical Starting Point

Instead of a formal assessment, consider:

1. A short internal survey
2. A simple stakeholder workshop
3. A focused discussion with key stakeholders

Ask three straightforward questions:

- > What sustainability issues matter most to you?
- > Where can we make the biggest difference?
- > What concerns you?

Then:

- > Identify common themes
- > Look for areas of overlap
- > Focus on what is within your influence

The goal at this stage is clarity, focus and ownership - not perfection. Achieving this will help you shape and embed action. You can always develop a more formal assessment process as your sustainability maturity progresses.

Step 3: Identify Your Focus Areas

You cannot do everything, and you should not try.

A good initial action plan can focus on 3–5 priority areas, proportionate to your size, role influence, and aligned to the work you are already doing.

When deciding where to focus, use:

- > Your stakeholder feedback
- > Your operational footprint
- > The themes within the Sustainability Maturity Tool
- > Areas where you have influence and momentum

Bringing action alive under the maturity tool

The Sport England Sustainability Maturity Tool is the overarching framework for sustainability across all System Partners. It sets out what good looks like across your environmental impact and your wider influence, helping you to understand:

- > Where you are now
- > Where you need to progress
- > What different stages of maturity look like

The Tool operates at a relatively high level, allowing for the full range of System Partner shapes, sizes and contexts.

The BASIS 12 Principles

The BASIS 12 Principles are designed to help break that high-level framework down into practical action areas.

Think of it like this:

- > The Maturity Tool provides the structure and progression pathways
- > The 12 Principles provide practical themes you can act on

The 12 Principles sit comfortably within the Maturity Tool categories and can help you translate ambition into specific actions. They are not an alternative framework - they are a practical companion resource.

These principles reflect common areas of action in sport and align well with the Maturity Tool themes.

Environmental:



Energy & Emissions



Waste Management



Water & Effluents



Materials & Chemicals



Travel & Transport



Food & Drink

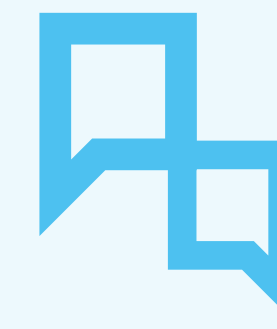
Social:



Accessibility & Equality



Healthy Options



Engagement & Education

Economic:



Procurement & Employment



Economy & Community

You do not need to address all 12. Indeed, you don't have to use them at all. They are simply available to you as a menu of possible action areas to help you decide where to focus.

Applying a simple materiality lens

When clarifying your priorities, ask:

- Where do we have the greatest impact?
- Where do we have the greatest influence?
- Where do stakeholders expect action?
- Where can we realistically deliver progress?

The goal is not to cover every issue. In our experience, organisations that choose fewer priorities and do them well make more progress more quickly. You can always expand your focus as your sustainability maturity progresses.



Step 4: Turn Priorities Into Action

This is where many plans fail. Ambition must become action.

For each priority area, define:

- > Outcome
- > Action
- > Target
- > Owner
- > Timeframe

Example

Outcome: **Reduce energy use**

Action: **Conduct energy audit of main office**

Target: **10% reduction by 2027**

Owner: **Facilities Manager**

Timeframe: **Q4 2026**

Every action must have:

- > A named owner
- > A measurable indicator
- > A realistic timeframe

If it does not have these things, it is not yet an action.

SMART Targets

Targets should be:

- > Specific
- > Measurable
- > Achievable
- > Relevant
- > Time-bound

Don't be afraid to start modestly - actual credible action is far better than undeliverable ambition.

Step 5: Governance, Monitoring & Review

A plan without governance is a document on a shelf.

You need:

- > A named sustainability lead or working group
- > Regular reporting to Board/SMT
- > Integration into business planning
- > Annual review
- > Communication of progress

Leadership commitment is critical to long-term success.

Governance checklist

- > Is sustainability discussed at Board level?
- > Is it integrated into risk registers?
- > Is progress reviewed annually?
- > Are KPIs monitored?
- > Is progress communicated publicly?

Aligning With the Sustainability Maturity Tool

Your action plan should clearly show:

1. Current maturity level
2. Target maturity level in 12 months time
3. Actions that move you between levels

For example:

If you are currently “Starting” in carbon reduction, you will probably be engaging with some resources and taking some energy reduction actions (e.g. switching to LED lightbulbs), but without a guiding framework.

If you are “Progressing” in carbon reduction, you will probably be measuring your scope 1 & 2 emissions, identifying and measuring actions, and starting to raise awareness internally within your sport.

If you are “Sustainable” in carbon reduction, you will probably (among other things) be powered by renewable energy, encouraging sustainable transport options, segregating waste, managing water use closely, and following sustainable procurement practices.



Your action plan is your roadmap between levels.

Making your action plan credible

A credible plan:

- > Focuses on what you can influence
- > Is realistic about capacity
- > Avoids vague language
- > Shows delivery, not aspiration
- > Includes reporting commitments
- > Demonstrates learning

Avoid:

- ✗ Over-claiming
- ✗ Setting targets without baseline data
- ✗ Promising net zero without roadmap
- ✗ Including actions without ownership

Structure of a simple sustainability action plan

Your final document could follow this structure:

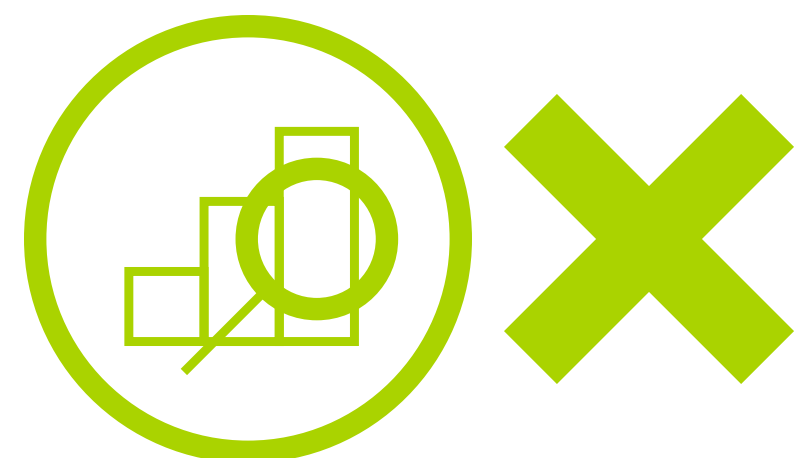
1. Introduction & Context
2. Why Sustainability Matters to Us
3. Our Current Position
4. Our Priority Areas
5. Action Plan (table format)
6. Governance & Accountability
7. Monitoring & Reporting
8. Review Cycle

It does not need to be long - a few pages of clear, structured content is often all you need to get going.

Common Challenges (And How to Overcome Them)



“We don’t have capacity.”
Start small and focus on 3 priorities.



“We don’t have data.”
Start with what you know and improve over time.



“Leadership is not fully engaged.”
Frame sustainability in terms of cost savings, risk management, reputation, and funding security.



“We’re worried about being criticised.”
Transparency builds trust.

The Three Golden Rules

1 ✓

Be Relevant:
Focus on what matters to your mission and footprint.

2 ✓

Be Practical:
Focus on actions you can deliver.

3 ✓

Be Transparent:
Report honestly on progress and setbacks.

Your First Steps

1. Review the [Sustainability Maturity Tool](#)
2. Convene a small internal working group
3. Draft your purpose statement
4. Identify 3–5 focus areas
5. Populate an action table
6. Secure leadership approval
7. Communicate internally
8. Begin delivery

Conclusion

A sustainability action plan is not about producing a perfect document.

It is about:

- > Building confidence
- > Creating clarity
- > Driving action
- > Demonstrating leadership
- > Supporting Every Move
- > Strengthening your organisation

Every organisation will look different. That's a strength, not a weakness. To make it credible, make your plan right-for-you, relevant and realistic.

Supporting Resources

View other [System Partner action plans](#)

Check out the [Maturity Tool Hub](#)

Use the [Sustainability Action Planning Template](#)

Book a [1-2-1](#) with Lucy, Project Lead, to discuss your action plan

Share your knowledge so others can learn. Collaboration is key!



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