

Ball State University

2025-30 Environmental Stewardship Plan

7/25/2025

Background

Ball State University has a long legacy of being good stewards of the resources entrusted to us. We plan to preserve and harness our internationally recognized leadership position.

- In 2006, Ball State was one of the first 12 universities in the Nation that committed to greatly reducing the environmental impact of our operations.
- Our University implemented one of the largest geothermal district heating and cooling systems in the Nation that reduced our energy usage by 50%, saving millions of dollars. Construction of the system started in 2009 and was completed in 2015.
- Ball State was a founding member of numerous national and state organizations and initiatives, including the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education and its annual conference, the Indiana chapter of the US Green Building Council, the Carbon Credit Purchasing Program, and the Sustainability Tracking, Assessment, and Rating System (STARS) reporting platform for universities.
- In 2001, our University formed the Council on the Environment (COTE), the longest-standing committee focused on this issue within the Indiana higher education community.
- Ball State's Board of Trustees accepted the University's *2021 Campus Plan Update*, the *2015 Campus Master Plan*, and the *2007-2012 Strategic Plan: Education Redefined* that included a goal that all new campus buildings and renovations to existing buildings are designed to meet the Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification guidelines at the Silver or higher level.

In 2020-2021, the Campus Sustainability Structure and Planning Review (CSSPR) Task Force was convened to comprehensively review Ball State's organizational structure, operational planning, and implementation of our practices. The CSSPR examined emerging trends in universities to identify needs, opportunities, and actionable items for Ball State. It made a number of recommendations, including development of a stewardship plan, hiring of a leader who was focused on collaborating across campus and departments to advance our resource efficiency and effectiveness in this area, and the exploration of funding options to support implementation.

Environmental Stewardship Plan Development Process

Over the course of 2023-25, the university conducted a planning process to develop the action plan. The process included interviews, surveys, and charrettes for a total of nearly 1,200 students, faculty, and staff perspectives, of which nearly 700 participants were students. Through the process, students, faculty, and staff participants re-affirmed that, as Ball State balances its limited resources of time, energy, and available funding, they believed that our University should prioritize strategies that reduced the environmental impact of our operations to as low as possible.

For the stakeholders, focusing on these practices is an approach that improves our quality of life. Ball State's students, faculty, and staff respondents were interested in not only supporting University resource efficiency and effectiveness initiatives, but also in taking individual actions themselves to improve the campus. Over 80% of the respondents were willing to spend at least one hour or more a month to improve their practices on campus. Ball State will harness that interest and provide opportunities for its community members to enhance our collective quality of place and life.

2025-30 Environmental Stewardship Plan

Our University aims to continuously reduce the environmental impact of our operations to as low as possible, as soon as operationally possible, ideally by 2030. According to our University's most recent assessment, building operations and energy use, transportation services, and waste management practices account for over 87% of its total environmental impact.

Therefore, to reach our goals, Ball State plans to:

1. Build and renovate high-performing, efficient, and accessible buildings
 - a. Prioritize energy and water efficiency, accessibility, and intentional, contemplative green spaces in new building construction and renovations.
 - b. Evaluate buildings every five years to ensure maximum, efficient performance and make modifications, if needed.
2. Optimize for an efficient, multi-modal, campus transportation system and fleet
 - a. Lower the number of single occupancy vehicles coming to campus.
 - b. Transition to fuels with less environmental impact.
3. Reduce campus waste
 - a. Improve the recycling rate attributed to individual action.
 - b. Re-assess departmental standard practices on a regular basis, especially the purchase and use of single-use plastics, to decrease waste, encourage reuse, and strengthen recycling efforts.
 - c. Minimize food waste by enhancing food recovery and composting.
4. Foster a knowledgeable, values-aligned, and thriving campus culture in this area

- a. Designate consistent funding that supports the implementation of this work, such as a revolving loan fund, student fee, or other revenue sources.
- b. Convene knowledgeable and empowered champions who can engage with others to implement holistic, cross-departmental, collaborative solutions and activities.
- c. Increase environmental literacy and corresponding behavioral changes.
- d. Communicate and report on actions and progress for accountability.

Triple Bottom Line: The Importance of Social and Financial Aspects

As recommended by the CSSPR Task Force, the planning process was guided by a broad definition that focused on the triple bottom line of balancing the needs of people, planet and profits. Beyond environmental stewardship, there were a number of findings from the stakeholder engagement process that related to the social and financial aspects. Examples were increasing the sense of community on campus, employee compensation and spending that are values-aligned, fiscal responsibility, student success and financial wellness.

Ball State University's strategic plan, *Our Flight Path*, and its accompanying implementation plans and progress reports, reflect the University's firm commitment to these broader social and financial aspects. For that reason, they are not reflected in this environmental stewardship plan.

Next Steps

For each of the actions above, Ball State's next steps will be to:

1. Identify the areas across campus with responsibility for implementing the goals, if not already in progress.
2. Mobilize knowledgeable and empowered champions within those areas.
3. Develop metrics and goals to measure success and return on investment.
4. Set timelines for achievement of the goals.
5. Estimate the costs and identify funding mechanisms for implementation.
6. Deploy available resources.
7. Track and communicate Ball State's progress.