SUSTAINABLENGOs

Sustainability guide
for youth NGOs

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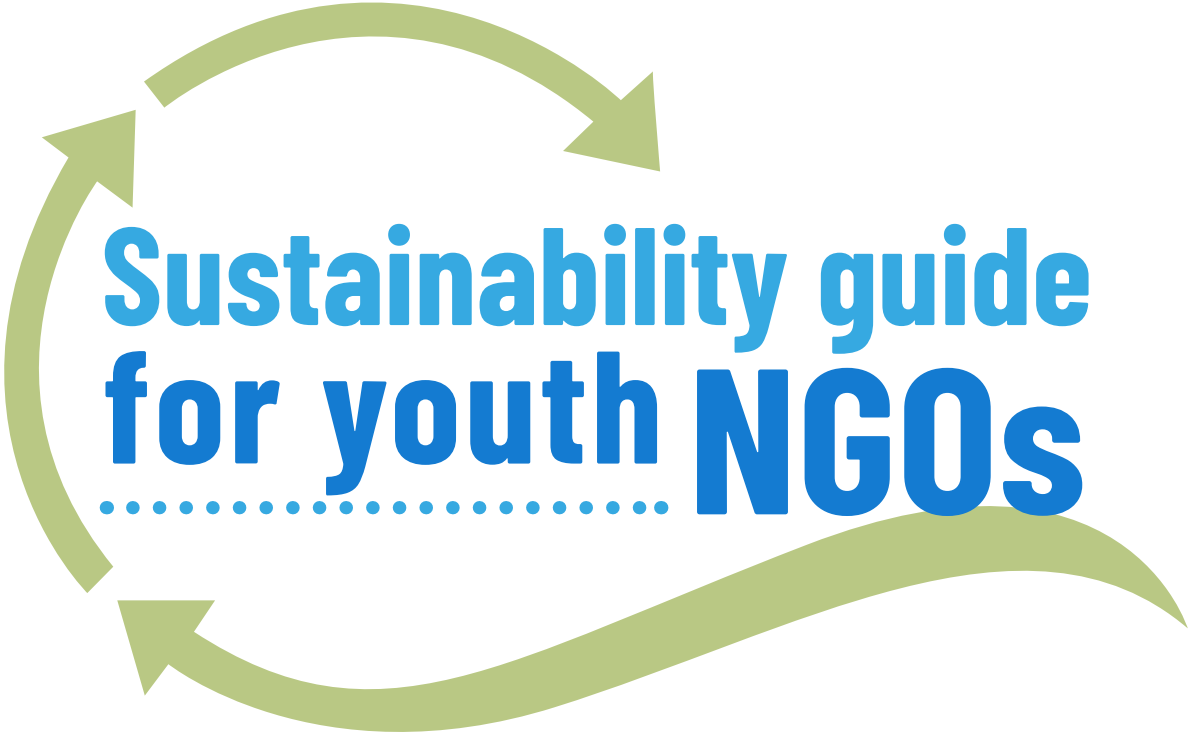
Sustainability guide for youth NGOs

SUSTAINABLENGOs

The **Sustainable NGOs** project is an alliance at the European level to raise awareness about climate change and environmental challenges in the youth sector. Following the line of the European and world strategic documents, it is intended to train young people, workers, and youth leaders for the ecological transition, promoting a more sustainable way of working, improving their sustainability skills, and helping to change their habits and behaviors so that they become agents of change both inside and outside of youth organizations.

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What Is This Guide?

The **Sustainable NGOs guide** is a resource designed to guide the youth sector and youth organizations in enhancing their sustainability practices. Utilizing this guide, entities can foster a positive impact on both the environment and society, thereby contributing to a more sustainable and mindful future.

Together with the [Carbon Footprint Calculator (CFC)](#) developed within the same project and adjusted specifically for youth NGOs, it is intended that NGOs themselves evaluate the environmental impact of their actions and obtain tools to explore more sustainable options.

How it works? ....

The guide is divided into five different chapters that coincide with the elements to be measured by the CFC. They all follow the same section structure:

- **How to measure the carbon footprint:** In this section, you can find specific information on how to use the tool to measure the carbon footprint of your organization for each chapter.

- **Thermometer:** This section presents various statements as Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) that can be used to evaluate your organization's level of sustainability. This tool serves as a supplement to the carbon footprint measurement by incorporating social and economic aspects that are not accounted for in the carbon footprint calculator.

- **Dynamic:** Each chapter has a proposed dynamic to work in groups within your organization. The idea is that, collectively, you work on different aspects of sustainability, ground them in your reality, and internalize them.

- **Tips:** Three different tips, sorted by difficulty, are offered to implement sustainable practices in your organization.

- **Good to know!:** Throughout the guide, you will find links to intriguing websites and exemplary initiatives that you can explore and draw inspiration from.

Green Competencies

These include skills, knowledge, and attitudes that enable people to understand and address current and future environmental and social challenges.

GreenComp, the European framework of competencies on sustainability, describes the necessary competencies for the green transition and includes critical thinking, taking initiatives, respect for nature, and understanding the impact of actions and decisions on the environment and the global climate.

Challenges and Objectives

What are we up against?.....................

Based on the findings of the research report conducted under the Sustainable NGOs project, it was observed that, although awareness of the importance of sustainability has been growing, there remain challenges within the realm of youth organizations.

- **Lack of awareness:** Many youth organizations may not have a complete understanding of the importance of sustainability and how they can contribute positively through their actions.

- **Resource constraints:** Some youth organizations may not have sufficient financial or human resources to implement sustainable initiatives effectively.

- **Resistance to change:** There may be resistance or lack of support within the entity to adopt more sustainable practices due to a lack of understanding or perception that this can be costly or complicated.

- **Lack of clear metrics:** Measuring sustainability progress can be challenging if clear and relevant KPIs are not established to assess the impact of implemented actions.

What impact will following the guide's actions have? ....

With the implementation of the actions proposed in the guide, we can achieve the following results and benefits:

- **Increased awareness and commitment:** The guide will help raise awareness of the importance of sustainability in youth organizations and encourage a greater commitment to integrating more sustainable practices into their operations and activities.

- **Better resource management:** By setting KPIs and monitoring performance, youth organizations will be able to identify areas for improvement in resource management.

- **Positive impact on the community:** The implementation of sustainable practices can have a positive impact on the local community and society in general, showing the commitment of youth organizations towards social welfare.

- **Added value and networking:** Sustainability can add value to youth organizations and attract other entities that share the same values.

- **Contribution to sustainable development:** By adopting sustainable practices and measuring their impact through KPIs, youth organizations become active actors on the path towards sustainable development at a local and global level.

The **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)** are a call for action by all countries to promote prosperity while protecting the planet. They recognize that ending poverty must go hand-in-hand with strategies that build economic growth and address a range of social needs including education, health, social protection, and job opportunities, while tackling climate change and environmental protection.[1]

[1] Neshovski, R. (2023, 1 agosto). «Home - United Nations Sustainable Development». United Nations Sustainable Development. https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/

Through this project, we contribute to:

SDG 3: Good health and well-being: Promoting actions that have a positive impact on the (mental) health and well-being of youth and the wider community. By minimizing our carbon footprint, we enhance air quality and decrease exposure to pollutants, thereby contributing to a healthier environment.

SDG 7: Affordable and clean energy: Encouraging the adoption of energy efficiency practices and the use of renewable and socially just energy sources, contributing to the goal of providing access to affordable and sustainable energy for the population.

SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities: Raising awareness of the importance of sustainability in the ways we inhabit spaces. Encouraging communities to adopt more environmentally and socially responsible practices.

SDG 12: Responsible consumption and production: Promoting a way of consuming that respects the environment and people's rights. Making conscious choices, fostering the circular economy, reducing waste, and promoting reuse and recycling.

SDG 13: Climate action: Implementing concrete actions and taking measures to curb climate change in different aspects of our daily lives.

SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals: Creating partnerships and collaborations between youth organizations and other actors in different countries to promote sustainability. Working together towards a common goal, strengthening the capacity to achieve results.

A Sustainable NGO

The concept of sustainability varies among different groups and over time. To develop this guide, we have decided to follow the term chosen by the European Greencomp framework: "the prioritization of the needs of all forms of life and of the planet, ensuring that human activity does not exceed planetary limits".[2]

[2] European Commission, Joint Research Centre, (2022). GreenComp, El marco europeo de competencias sobre sostenibilidad, Publications Office of the European Union. https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/094757

When we talk about sustainable entities, we cannot only focus on environmental sustainability since these challenges are directly related to the economy and societies. For this reason, we talk about sustainability in its most comprehensive form, encompassing three fundamental dimensions that are interconnected and complement each other to create a balance between human needs and care for our planet.

- **Environmental sustainability** focuses on protecting and preserving the environment, guaranteeing the responsible use of natural resources, and minimizing the negative impact of human activities on the environment. This implies adopting conservation practices, reducing polluting emissions, and promoting renewable energies and biodiversity.

- **Economic sustainability** refers to the ability to maintain healthy and stable economic growth over time, without depleting resources or generating significant inequalities. To achieve this, it is necessary to promote a circular economy that promotes reuse, recycling, and efficient use of resources. Likewise, it seeks to promote the creation of decent employment, access to economic opportunities for all people, and the strengthening of local communities.

- **Social sustainability** seeks to guarantee well-being and equity for all people, ensuring that basic needs such as health, education, housing, and security are met. In addition, it implies promoting social inclusion, respecting human rights, and encouraging citizen participation in decision-making that affects their lives.

Adapting the organizational model . . . .

To achieve sustainability in our organization, it is not enough to implement isolated and superficial practices, but rather make a profound change in our thinking and our vision. This implies internalizing and assimilating certain values as part of our identity.

What is greenwashing? . . . .

Greenwashing is a tactic used to present a product or company as more sustainable than it really is in order to improve its image and attract people who value sustainability. It involves marketing tactics that highlight isolated aspects of sustainability while ignoring its true negative impact. This can include green slogans or vague claims without a solid basis.

Greenwashing creates an illusion of addressing environmental issues when, in reality, they remain unresolved. This misdirection prevents us from supporting truly eco-conscious businesses and weakens our collective push for broader sustainable adoption.[3]

And how do we get rid of it? . . . .

To avoid greenwashing and promote true sustainability, we must focus on our social and environmental responsibility. Embracing ethical principles involves a sincere examination of internal practices, ranging from operations and supply chains to human resources policies. Transparent communication and sharing honest information are also key elements.

An ethical and real alternative to greenwashing practices is the social and solidarity economy.

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[3] Das, L. (2022). Greenwash: What it is and how not to fall for it. Greenpeace UK. https://www.greenpeace.org.uk/news/what-is-greenwashing/

This approach constitutes another vision of the economy that places the values of equity, justice, solidarity, commitment to the environment, and direct democracy at the heart of its activities.[4] Organizations that adhere to this model, such as cooperatives, mutuals, non-profit associations, and social enterprises, seek to generate a positive impact on society and the environment, beyond economic profit.

By adopting the principles of the social and solidarity economy, an organization incorporates responsibility for social and environmental well-being into its mission and actions and does not just use them as a marketing pitch.

Good to know!

Socioeco.org is an online library dedicated to the social and solidarity economy and its associated concepts. It contains documents in 5 different languages and offers resources such as mappings, publications, or videos.

Green claims is a new criteria established by the EU to stop companies from making misleading claims about the environmental merits of their products and services, preventing greenwashing and ensuring that green claims are accurate and transparent.

What are KPIs?

KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) are key indicators that we can use to measure the progress and performance of our organization or project in relation to its objectives and goals. These indicators provide a quantifiable way of evaluating our actions or the results we are achieving.[5]

Establishing KPIs in our organization can help us to identify areas for improvement and make informed decisions to achieve our objectives. These indicators will help us to maintain focus on critical aspects and facilitate decision-making based on the results obtained.

KPIs vary according to the specific objectives you want to achieve. Here are some KPIs to measure sustainability:
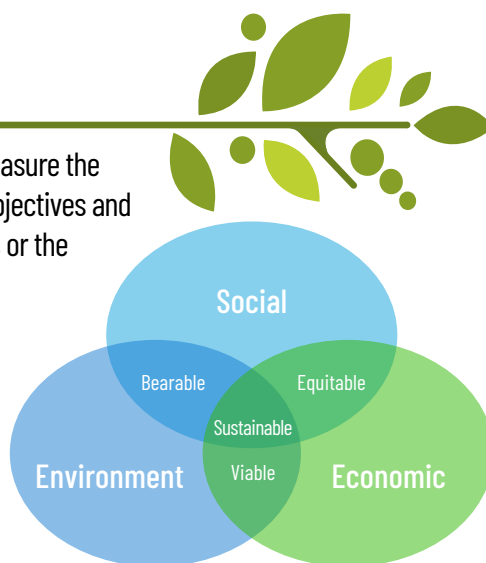
SOCIAL KPIs:
- Inclusion and diversity
- Transparency
- Supply chain accountability

ECONOMIC KPIs:
- Local economy

[4] La economía social y solidaria: una economía para las personas – economiasolidaria.org. (2022, 7 diciembre). economiasolidaria.org. https://www.economia-solidaria.org/ca/recursos/biblioteca-la-economia-social-y-solidaria-una-economia-para-las-personas/

[5] Enclavesocial. (2018, 17 diciembre). «¿Cuáles son los KPI de tu organización?», ONG Excelente. https://ongexcelente.org/2019/01/04/cuales-son-los-kpi-de-tu-organizacion/#:~:text=Los%20KPI%20%28del%20ingl%C3%A9s%2C%20Key%20Performance%20Indicator%29%20son%2C,el%20resultado%20que%20estamos%20obteniendo%20en%20la%20organizaci%C3%B3n.

Diagnosis Through KPIs

Is my NGO sustainable?

SOCIAL KPIs

- **Inclusion and diversity:**
Do we ensure that all voices and perspectives are represented and considered?

- **Transparency:**
Is our financial and decision-making information available and accessible to partners, supporters, beneficiaries, and the wider community?

- **Supply chain accountability:**
Do we monitor and evaluate the supply chain to ensure that it complies with the principles of sustainability and respect for human rights?

ECONOMIC KPIs:

- **Local economy:**
Do we collaborate with local initiatives to promote economic development in our territory?

ENVIRONMENTAL KPIs:

- **Waste management:**
Do we implement practices to reduce, reuse, and recycle waste generated in our activities and events?

- **Materials used:**
Do we encourage the responsible use of natural resources and the minimization of disposable materials in our activities?

- **Energy consumption:**
Do we implement strategies to reduce our energy consumption and prioritize renewable energy sources?

- **Carbon footprint:**
Do we conduct regular assessments of our carbon footprint to understand and reduce our environmental impact?

Chapter 1: Food

What forms of consumption and food do we choose for our events?

It is crucial to reflect on the food we eat, its origin, and production, since our food choices have a direct impact on our health, the environment, and the rest of society.

Opting for sustainable food goes beyond simply selecting items with eco-friendly labels. It is also about considering the types of food we consume. We should question and investigate the product's origin, the distance it traveled to reach us, and whether it is packaged in plastic or not.

How does our diet influence our carbon footprint?

Plant-based foods significantly reduce the use of natural resources and the emission of greenhouse gases, generating a smaller carbon footprint than animal-based foods, which also have a greater need for agricultural land and livestock. Likewise, depending on the type of meat we consume, our footprint will also vary. Generally, red meat is noted to have a larger environmental footprint than white meat, given the resource-intensive nature of its production and its elevated greenhouse gas emissions.

On the other hand, the choice between consuming organic or conventionally farmed products is also important. Organic products, grown without the use of pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, protect biodiversity and promote more environmentally friendly farming practices. In addition, organic farming tends to have lower energy consumption and waste generation, which contributes to a smaller environmental footprint.

For more information:
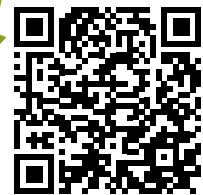
Dynamic *Union makes us strong*

Design an internal campaign on a sustainable eating theme, such as "Meatless Monday" or "Fruit Week". In this campaign, you can also prepare a tasting of products and compare their different flavors. Choose seasonal fruit and vegetables and source them from a local farmer—this is a way to get closer to local production initiatives, get to know them firsthand, and start collaborating with them for future events.

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have?
○ We buy in local stores.	We reduce the carbon footprint associated with transportation and support the local economy, fostering community resilience and reducing the environmental impact of large-scale supply chains.
○ We check the certificates of our food.	Certificates of our food, such as those indicating animal welfare, social benefits, organic production, and fair trade, provide transparency and assurance about sustainable and ethical practices. By choosing products with such certifications, we can contribute to a more sustainable and responsible food system, promoting environmentally friendly and socially just production methods.
○ We personally know the producers we work with.	This increases transparency and trust in the supply chain, allowing us to verify sustainable practices. Additionally, personal knowledge of food producers can foster long-term relationships based on mutual trust, encouraging feedback and dialogue, enabling the promotion of environmentally responsible and socially equitable production methods.
○ We work with people who transmit the most respectful traditions and practices.	These practices tend to be more resource-efficient and biodiversity-friendly. The bond between the community and the environment is strengthened, fostering the conservation of traditional knowledge that can coexist harmoniously with the surrounding ecosystem.
○ We consume seasonal products.	We reduce the need for long-distance transportation and greenhouse gas emissions associated with the import of out-of-season produce. Additionally, we support local ecosystems while promoting biodiversity.

Tips

Select food providers that support responsible practices with the environment and people. You can check their certifications, but beware—while there are many certifications available, remember that authenticity and transparency are key. Do your research and choose products backed by credible certifications.

Eliminate single-use containers by using reusable dinnerware and snack holders, buying in bulk, or installing water filtration systems.

Avoid buying processed and packaged products and replace them with fresher and healthier natural products.

Good to know!

PGS – Participatory Guarantee Systems Worldwide (ifoam.bio)

These mechanisms offer certification and quality assurance for agricultural goods and foodstuffs, particularly within agroecological production. Their aim is to verify that products are cultivated or processed using sustainable, eco-friendly, and socially equitable methods.

Unlike conventional certification systems, PGSs are based on the active participation of local stakeholders (farmers, producers, consumers) and other members of the community who collaborate in the evaluation and control of compliance with the standards.

Aprofitem els aliments | Juntos contra el desperdicio

This is a non-profit organization that works in a network with people and organizations that promote a culture of food recycling. They are a social and transformation movement towards a more responsible and sustainable food model. Their objectives are to work collaboratively to reduce waste throughout the food cycle and promote a sustainable consumption model, aligned with SDGs 2 and 12 of the UN Agenda 2030.

Podnebni meni – Umanotera

Podnebni meni (Climate menu) is a project lead by Sloveninan NGO Umanotera that promotes low-carbon food production and consumption and aims to raise awareness of the unsustainability of current food systems and dietary habits and presents low-carbon alternatives.

Chapter 2: Daily Commuting

How do we move in our day-to-day?

At present, the transportation sector stands as a primary contributor to greenhouse gas emissions.[6] This is why reevaluating our daily commutes is essential for minimizing our carbon footprint and safeguarding our planet.

Sustainable transport options such as walking, cycling, and public transport minimize air pollution and create healthier cities. Embracing active modes of transportation contributes to reducing sedentary lifestyles and associated health risks, promoting overall well-being and quality of life.

In addition, these modes of transport also offer opportunities to improve accessibility, which is important to ensure the inclusion of people with reduced mobility. Infrastructure such as wheelchair ramps, accessible sidewalks, or lifts in public transport ensure that everyone can participate in sustainable travel practices.

How do our daily commutes influence our carbon footprint?

Cycling and walking are the best alternatives for daily commuting, fostering an active, healthy lifestyle without generating direct emissions. These modes of transport are followed by trains and buses, producing relatively low emissions per passenger compared to individual vehicles.

Among the different car types, electric vehicles stand out as the most favorable option, with virtually zero emissions while driving. In contrast, internal combustion vehicles release considerable amounts of greenhouse gasses due to the burning of fossil fuels. Overall, diesel vehicles tend to have a slightly lower carbon footprint in terms of fuel consumption and carbon dioxide emissions per kilometer driven compared to petrol vehicles.

For more information:

Dynamic *Sustainable route*

Try and organize a sustainable route through your area or municipality. You can choose an urban or rural route, the important thing to keep in mind is that the means of transport you use are as sustainable as possible. Also, on your route, you can visit local initiatives that incorporate sustainability criteria into their practices. Carefully plan your essentials, breaks, and meals to reduce the need for single-use containers.

[6] Overview. (s. f.). Climate Action. https://climate.ec.europa.eu/eu-action/transport/overview_en

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have?
○ We provide practical information on sustainable transport options such as routes, schedules, etc.	This initiative encourages the use of public transportation, cycling, and walking, which not only reduces the ecological footprint but also promotes healthier lifestyles and improves air quality. By this, we play a role in creating more resilient and eco-friendly communities.
○ Our facilities are adequate and allow access for people with reduced mobility.	By ensuring that our facilities are well-equipped and accessible, we create an inclusive environment, empowering everyone to participate fully in our activities, regardless of their physical abilities. In this way, we are fostering a sense of belonging and promoting diversity.
○ Our facilities have accessible signage	With clear symbols, contrasting colors, and plain language in our signage, we aim to enhance understanding for a broader audience, promoting social inclusion. Cognitive accessibility refers to the adaptation of the environment and information so that it is understandable and accessible to all people.[7]
○ We offer space to safely store bikes.	Offering a safe and convenient place to store bikes not only encourages employees and visitors to choose a greener commuting option but also contributes to a more eco-conscious workplace culture.
○ We promote collaborative transport, facilitating logistics and communication between the people of the entity.	By this, we help decrease the number of individual vehicles on the road. Additionally, individuals can save on fuel and maintenance costs, making transportation more affordable for everyone involved. This fosters cost-effectiveness and community engagement.

[7] Adecco, F. (2020, 8 octubre). Qué es la accesibilidad cognitiva - Diversidad e inclusión. Diversidad e inclusión. https://fundacionadecco.org/azimut/la-accesibilidad-cognitiva/

Tips

Promote shared mobility, renting vehicles instead of buying them, or forming part of shared mobility transport cooperatives, which have vehicles that members can share.

The organization can also offer a bike for employees or members to share if there are no other options nearby.

Promote walking or biking to the office or events by making sure parking is safe, places are easy to get to, and accessible to everyone. You can organize cycling-related events or challenges to promote cycling (e.g. car-free day) or offer incentives for people who choose this mode of transport, such as soft drinks or bicycle equipment.

Offering remote work options and schedule flexibility can help reduce the need for daily commuting. However, it is crucial to note that in such scenarios, individuals bear the energy costs that would otherwise be covered by the organization. Think about how to compensate for this, and remember that physical contact is also necessary to foster personal relationships in the team.

Good to know!

The Mobility Factory is a European Network of local, sustainable mobility cooperatives. It has developed a platform that allows cooperatives to offer an e-car sharing service according to their operational needs.

BicikeLj/**Valenbisi**/**I'Velo**—many cities, including Bucharest, Ljubljana, and Valencia, offer city bikes to rent for a friendly price or a monthly/yearly subscription.

Soterranya is a social, environmental and cultural association that aims to create critical awareness among citizens, encouraging civil society to participate in the transformation of their environment to a more just, sustainable and humane one. Their project **"Bicicletas Inclusivas"** is an action aimed at acquiring adapted bicycles that facilitate access to sustainable mobility for two groups traditionally relegated from it.

The **Clean Cities Campaign** is a European coalition of NGOs and grassroots groups which aims to encourage cities to transition to zero-emission transport by 2030. You can check their article **'What if we could have one car-free day a week?'**

The *Junta de Andalucía* (Spain), has published a **Guide of good practices for an Accessible Signage in Buildings** where resources, tools, and a catalogue of pictograms for the accessible signage of buildings are collected.

Chapter 3: Travel

What means of transport do we choose on our trips?

When traveling, especially over medium or long distances, we should avoid relying solely on air transport whenever possible. We can consider more sustainable alternatives such as trains or buses. If we are going to travel by car, we can choose electric vehicles. These promote green energy by using electricity as their power source, which can be generated from renewable sources. However, it is important to acknowledge that electric cars are not entirely emissions-free, as their environmental impact is influenced by the energy sources used for electricity generation and the materials used in their production. Therefore, shared mobility services offer a promising solution by optimizing the use of vehicles and reducing environmental impact.

Moreover, it is sensible to reconsider our travel needs and make efforts to lower dependency on cars altogether. We can ask ourselves whether we really need to make a trip just for a meeting, or whether we can conduct that meeting by communicating remotely.

How do our travels influence our carbon footprint?

In addition to the transport options mentioned in the daily commuting section, we also need to consider other modes of transport for our travels. Ferries, often used for water crossings, provide a comparatively efficient mode of transport, emitting fewer greenhouse gases per person-km than airplanes. However, air travel still has a notably higher carbon footprint due to the vast amount of energy required for takeoff and cruising.

For more information:

Dynamic *Let's evaluate our trip*

Have you ever taken a trip for your organization? We propose you to evaluate the environmental impact it had. Think, above all, about the transport practices used. Collect comments and suggestions to improve and make journeys more sustainable. You can compile all this data and generate a reference document that will be useful for future trips.

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have?
○ We make sure to occupy all the seats in our own vehicles on the trips we make.	In this way, we reduce individual car usage, optimizing resource utilization, and lowering overall carbon emissions.
○ We prioritize the use of transport such as trains or buses before planes or our own vehicles.	Public transportation generally has a lower carbon footprint per passenger and helps alleviate traffic congestion and air pollution.
○ In selecting our destination, a top criterion is its accessibility via sustainable transportation.	This fosters responsible tourism and supports locations that are accessible by eco-friendly means, reducing the overall environmental impact of travel.
○ We investigate routes and schedules that minimize trip duration and carbon emissions.	By meticulously planning our journeys, we strive to optimize resource utilization and lessen our environmental impact.
○ If driving by car is unavoidable, we use low emission vehicles or adopt efficient driving techniques.	Electric or hybrid cars produce lower carbon emissions and air pollutants, contributing to improved air quality. Moreover, driving at a constant speed, avoiding braking, or using high gears at low revs, can increase comfort and road safety, reduce travel time and fuel consumption, generating less emissions to the environment.[8]

[8] De la Región de Murcia, C. A., Consejería de Turismo, J. y. D., de Juventud, D. G., & de Animación y Tiempo Libre., E. R. (s/f). Guía para actividades de entidades juveniles sostenibles. Implantación de Buenas Prácticas Ambientales. https://www.mundojoven.org/documents/499657/0/guia+AEJ+Sostenibles/4be521ec-b8fc-4c1f-a658-7efe966341fd

Tips

For long journeys, opt for night trains rather than flights. This way you can make the most of the sleep you get while traveling to your destination.

When preparing the luggage, you can avoid the use of disposable plastic bags and pack efficiently, thus reducing the weight of luggage to minimize fuel consumption during transport.

Organize information sessions on the most sustainable mobility options before the trip that promote awareness and responsibility regarding this issue. If travel times are planned in advance, it will be easier to enable the use of sustainable transport.

Good to know!

Back-on-Track is a European network to promote cross-border night trains. They advocate for increased, improved, affordable, long-distance, and cross-border night trains in Europe to replace short- and medium-distance flights.

Kolobus (Bike bus/train) is an initiative known around the world, where cyclists meet at a certain point (or join along the way) and cycle together to/from work/school following a certain set route and use this time to chat and connect.

Green Friday is an initiative in Romania that was inspired by the "Fridays for Future" where politicians adopted a green travel style to their workplace on Fridays encouraging citizens to do the same. Furthermore, some cities also offered free public transport on Fridays as a way to reduce carbon emissions and to encourage citizens to opt for public transport instead of their cars.

Starting in 2021, the French city of **Clermont-Ferrand** began providing free public transport on weekends. This measure is a 24-month experiment. Moreover, in 2013, Tallinn became the first capital to offer free public transport for its residents. Subsequently, Luxembourg emerged as the first country to implement such a program for all its inhabitants.

"Flygskam" is a Swedish word that translates as "shame to fly" or "shame to travel by plane". This movement is a social trend emerging in Sweden that promotes awareness of the negative environmental impacts of air travel, encouraging people to reconsider their travel choices in favor of the environment.

Chapter 4: Accommodation

What aspects do we pay attention to when choosing accommodation?

When selecting accommodation, it is crucial to assess its dedication to sustainability.
This task can be challenging given the complexity of factors at play and the potential for greenwashing. Nonetheless, by prioritizing different aspects and adopting a discerning perspective, we can aim to choose accommodations that uphold the highest regard for both the environment and the local community.

Some of the issues to take into account are waste management, the use of energy and natural resources, as well as the location of the accommodation. We can also verify the commitment to sustainability through different types of certifications, both at a European and local level. Finally, the social and cultural practices carried out by the accommodation are very important. Find out if the accommodation is involved in initiatives to support the local community, such as hiring local staff, using local products and services, and respecting the traditions and customs of the place.

Moreover, when considering the services provided by small hostels in contrast to large hotel chains, it is often observed that the carbon footprint is significantly higher for hotels than for hostels.[9] This disparity stems largely from the massive infrastructure and operations of hotels, which tend to consume more energy resources and generate more emissions compared to more modest hostels.

How to measure the carbon footprint

The number of stars a hotel holds often correlates with its size, services, and amenities, all of which influence its energy and resource usage. Higher-end hotels with more amenities might have greater energy demands, resulting in a larger carbon footprint. Similarly, the number of people per room and the duration of stay directly impact energy consumption, waste generation, and emissions associated with guest activities.

The carbon footprint of hotel stays differs across countries, as each nation relies on its unique blend of energy sources for electricity production.

For more information:

Dynamic *Sleep Green*

Reflect on the different aspects that must be taken into account when considering accommodation as sustainable, and within these, draw up a list of priority criteria to take into account as an organization. Now is the time to conduct your own sustainable accommodation audit. Select a few that you are familiar with or are keen to learn about. Research how they manage the specific aspects you have chosen and assign a rating to them.

[9] Chan, T. (2022). Understanding the impact of hostels vs hotels. GSTC. https://www.gstcouncil.org/hostelworld-bureau-veritas-carbon-impact-analysis/

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have?
○ We take into account the accommodation's management of the waste generated.	By supporting hotels that implement efficient recycling, composting, and waste reduction initiatives, we foster a more eco-friendly travel industry.
○ We consider the location of the accommodation in relation to the activities that we are going to carry out.	By strategically selecting lodging that is conveniently situated in proximity to our planned activities, we minimize the need for excessive transportation.
○ We verify the certifications that the accommodation possesses, ensuring they align with sustainability principles.	By actively seeking out and considering certifications related to energy efficiency, water conservation, waste reduction, or other eco-friendly initiatives, we help drive positive change within the hospitality sector and encourage others to adopt similar practices.
○ We examine if the accommodation adheres to ethical social, cultural, and environmental practices.	This approach ensures that our stay contributes positively to the destination's cultural heritage, respects local traditions, and supports fair employment practices.
○ We ask about the environmental policy of the accommodation.	Environmental policies are sets of guidelines and practices implemented to minimize the environmental impact of the accommodation operations. The more we know about them, the more information we will have to make an informed decision based on our own criteria.

Tips

When selecting an accommodation, our primary focus will be on sustainability. To assess this, we can explore their website or even make a direct call for additional information. Pay attention to the keywords that can indicate an accommodation follows sustainability criteria: responsible tourism, culture, food sovereignty, slow food, proximity, social economy, recycling... The best way to make a decision is to fully understand the different options.

Expressing our commitment to sustainability openly and disclosing our preferences in these terms may also result in change. We can request that containers be set up for the separation of waste in the areas where we carry out our activities or request that if food or drinks are procured for us, they do not go in individual or single-use containers.

To generate the least impact when staying, we must avoid changing towels and sheets daily, sharing a room whenever possible, being responsible for turning on the lights in the different spaces, as well as taking care of closing doors and windows before turning on the air conditioning.

Good to know!

In Slovenia, the tourist accommodation can be certified with the Slovenia Green certificate, which is part of a national program promoting sustainable tourism, or be awarded the Zero waste title, when a business pledges to follow the zero waste principles.

In Romania, glamping started to become more popular lately, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic. Glamping sites seem to be more eco-friendly than traditional accommodation as they use renewable materials.

Més que acampar is a project of the Consell Valencià de la Joventut (Valencian Youth Council) that was created with the aim of facilitating the search for hostels when it comes to camps for youth organizations. This project highlights the work carried out by the different types of accommodation, offers tips for campers, and has also developed different quality labels, including one for sustainability.

Chapter 5: Office and Work

What practices, products, and services do we use in our work spaces?

The adoption of sustainable practices in our office should not only conserve resources but also enhance the well-being of its occupants. Furthermore, we should strive to create a workspace that minimizes environmental impact and fosters a positive influence on the community.

There are many aspects we can take into consideration when managing our office. In this chapter, we have selected those considered most relevant for youth NGOs.

How can we assess the carbon footprint of our office effectively?

Energy usage is typically measured in kilowatt-hours (kWh). This can be obtained from utility bills or energy monitoring systems. Pay attention to lighting, heating, cooling, and office equipment. Similarly, track your water consumption in cubic meters. Understanding when and where energy and water are being used the most can help identify areas for efficiency improvements.

In reference to waste production, regularly measure the weight of different waste streams generated within your office. This includes recyclables, organic waste, and general trash. Implement waste separation systems to facilitate accurate measurements. Analyzing waste production provides insights into consumption patterns and offers opportunities for waste reduction.

For telecommuting, collect data on the duration employees spend working remotely. This information can be sourced from employee timesheets or through specialized remote work monitoring tools.

Dynamic *Repair Café*

Repair Cafés are community events where people come together to repair objects instead of throwing them away, promoting sustainability, and reducing waste. Organize a day where each person in your organization brings an item that needs to be fixed. This is a great opportunity to share knowledge and collaborate to find solutions. Ensure you have all the required materials and tools ready. Consider setting up tables or workstations to organize the items that need repair.

Internet environmental impact

Nowadays, the use of technology plays a central role within youth organizations, transforming the ways of communication and collaboration, as well as promoting our causes. Digital platforms and social media are key tools to reach a wider and more diverse audience. Through the creation of multimedia content, streaming of online events and viral campaigns, they are able to spread their messages instantly, generating awareness and mobilization on relevant issues. In addition, technology has facilitated the internal management of organizations, enabling the coordination of tasks, participation in virtual meetings, and the collection of data for more informed decision-making.

Although we often overlook this aspect, it is important to recognize that the everyday use of internet and digital technologies also leaves a significant ecological footprint. Constant access to information, streaming multimedia content, and social media interaction require a complex technological infrastructure that consumes large amounts of energy and natural resources. From the data centers that house the information to the electronic devices we use, every click and download contributes to electricity demand and e-waste generation. Reflecting on this environmental impact urges us to adopt more conscious and sustainable practices in our use of technology, striking a balance between digital convenience and environmental responsibility.

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have? [10]
⃝ We avoid unnecessary emails or un-subscribe from newsletters that are no longer interesting.	Every email we receive has associated a certain carbon footprint. The more we avoid, the less CO2 emissions will be generated.
⃝ We delete old digital files that are not in use.	The energy used for data storage also contributes to the carbon footprint. By managing data more efficiently and deleting unnecessary files, you can help mitigate your environmental impact.
⃝ We reduce video resolution from HD to normal or low.	Decreasing the video quality can reduce our carbon footprint significantly. If we get into the habit of doing this, most of the time we will be reducing our environmental impact without noticing the difference (e.g. while playing background music videos).
⃝ We use ecological search engines.	These engines donate profit to conservation or humanitarian projects as a way of offsetting carbon emissions caused by data transmission and research.
⃝ We use Wi-Fi instead of a mobile data (e.g., 4G) internet connection.	Mobile data consumes at least 50% more energy than Wi-Fi.

[10] Debora Barioni, Amina Begić, Alessandro Galli, Tim Gregorčič, Harisa Muratović, Tadeja Pretnar. (2022). *CLIMATE-SMART CHOICES: How to Reduce Your Project's Carbon Footprint*. https://izo.si/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Interreg-Climate-Smart-Choices-A4.pdf

Energy consumption

To achieve sustainable energy consumption in office spaces, it is crucial to go beyond merely monitoring and reducing energy usage. While optimizing heating, cooling, and implementing energy-efficient lighting are valuable steps, a comprehensive approach encompasses a range of interconnected strategies. One such strategy involves embracing alternative energy sources and ethical considerations in energy procurement. This entails exploring the option of partnering with local and socially just energy cooperatives.

Local energy cooperatives often prioritize the use of renewable resources, such as solar and wind power, reducing the carbon footprint associated with energy consumption. Furthermore, they play a vital role in fostering community engagement and empowerment, encouraging a sense of shared responsibility for sustainable practices. These cooperatives should also be committed to fair treatment of workers, transparent supply chains, and avoiding the exploitation of natural resources.

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have?
○ We switch off heating/cooling in rooms that are never used.	By implementing this strategy, unnecessary energy consumption is avoided.
○ We turn off lights and shut down and unplug electronic devices when not in use (e.g. "standby mode" also uses energy).	Standby power consumption often goes unnoticed but can accumulate into substantial energy wastage over time. By completely powering down devices and unplugging chargers, we curtail unnecessary electricity consumption.
○ We hire local energy cooperatives that promote the generation of renewable energy and encourage local development.	This reduces reliance on fossil fuels, supports the development of clean energy infrastructure within the community, and fosters local economic growth.
○ We adjust blinds according to sun exposure.	This way, we can optimize indoor temperatures and reduce the need for excessive heating or cooling. This practice not only minimizes the reliance on artificial lighting and temperature control systems but also contributes to a more comfortable and energy-efficient living space.
○ We switch from incandescent light bulbs to light-emitting diodes (LEDs).	LED technology consumes significantly less energy to produce the same amount of light as incandescent bulbs. LED bulbs also have a longer lifespan, reducing the frequency of replacements and the associated waste. This switch contributes to lowering electricity bills while minimizing the impact of energy usage.

Office materials

When selecting materials for our office, it is vital to opt for choices that minimize environmental impact across the entire product lifespan. Selecting recycled and renewably sourced materials, as well as avoiding single-use products such as disposable plastics or reducing reliance on paper, promotes resource conservation and waste minimization. Choosing second-hand furniture or products with sustainability certifications also reflects a commitment to environmental responsibility.

Thermometer

What actions do we carry out?	What positive effects do they have?
◯ We promote paperless work, use recycled paper and environmentally friendly printing when necessary.	By reducing paper waste, we also reduce deforestation, greenhouse gas emissions from decomposition, water pollution, and habitat destruction. Recycled paper consumes less energy and water compared to producing paper from raw materials.
◯ We choose ecological cleaning products or buy them in bulk.	This contributes to a healthier indoor environment while minimizing the release of harmful chemicals into ecosystems.
◯ We avoid single-use materials.	Single-use materials, such as disposable cups, plates, and cutlery, contribute to excessive waste generation. Encouraging the use of reusable alternatives or providing communal dishware in office kitchens can significantly reduce the amount of single-use plastic and other disposables that end up in landfills.
◯ We procure second-hand and upcycled furniture.	This practice not only saves resources but also adds character to the workspace! Refurbished furniture reduces the demand for new products and helps extend the lifespan of existing items, promoting a circular economy approach.
◯ We acquire our uniforms in artisanal, sustainable, or ethical textile initiatives.	Textile industry is known for its high water usage and chemical pollution. By investing in ethical and eco-friendly clothing options, we benefit the environment as well as support decent labor rights and working conditions.

Tips

You can contract services from cooperatives or energy companies that promote clean and renewable energy, while guaranteeing labor rights and respecting the territory. A good indicator is to verify that these are aligned with the principles of the social and solidarity economy or that they are part of local energy communities.

Consider utilizing collaborative workspaces or coworking facilities. These not only foster sustainability through shared spaces and resources but also encourage flexibility, creativity, and teamwork. Such environments spur innovation and facilitate networking among entities with aligned profiles and objectives.

The rapid obsolescence of electronic devices and the high demand for new products generate large amounts of electronic waste. Think about whether it is necessary to buy something, or alternatives such as renting, exchanging, or reusing these products can be considered.

Good to know!

Atelierul de Pânză, Viitor Plus is a social enterprise with 11 years of experience in manufacturing environmentally-friendly textile products. In addition to their environmental mission, Atelierul de Pânză has a social mission of providing employment opportunities for people with disabilities or social challenges.

Impact Hub (Ljubljana): sharing space, knowledge, ideas, costs, and much more—it is what becoming a part of a co-working community working for a sustainable future such as Impact Hub (Ljubljana) brings to organizations and individuals.

Manj je več!—different maps offering information on locations of repair shops, recycling and reuse centers, zero-waste stores, and places to borrow equipment were created by a Slovenian NGO Ekologi brez meja. Their goal is to present alternatives that encourage reduced consumption through recycling, reusing, borrowing, repairing, etc.

European Green Office guidelines offer tips and information to transform offices into more environmentally and human-friendly spaces.

Thermometer Results

Here we are going to take the temperature of your NGO! Add one point for each "No" you have marked and see where your score is on the thermometer. The lower your thermometer is, the less you are contributing to climate change.
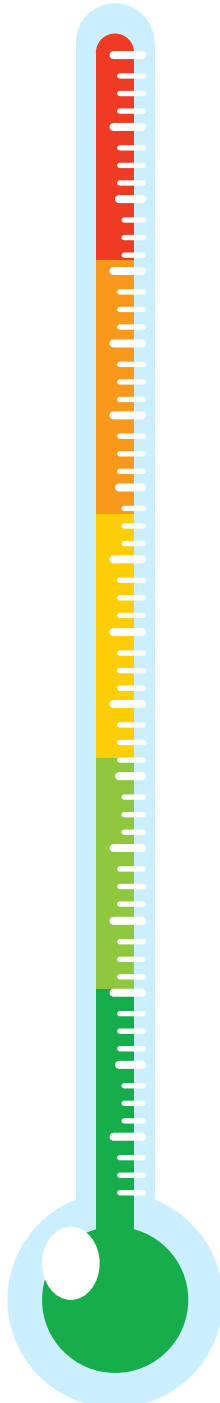
From 30 to 35 degrees: It seems that you are still at the beginning of implementing sustainable practices in your organization. Fortunately, you have the power to make a difference. Consider the recommendations and examples of good practices included in the guide, and explore new ways to incorporate them into your organization. By doing so, you will be contributing to the wellbeing of the planet and society at large. Take solace in the fact that you can indeed make a difference!

From 20 to 30 degrees: In your organization, you follow some good practices to reduce your ecological footprint, but you still have a long way to go. To improve further, look at your weaknesses and take a look at the recommendations in this guide—with a little extra effort, you can certainly lower your temperature!

From 10 to 20 degrees: Your organization's commitment to the environment is remarkable! Your actions reflect a conscious effort to mitigate climate change. You set a great example for other organizations. Still, look at where you can improve to further reduce your impact.

From 0 to 10 degrees: It is obvious that you have an impressive commitment to sustainability in your organization! You are taking meaningful actions to address climate change. We encourage you to continue to be a role model in your community and to share your knowledge to inspire other organizations to join the cause.

Sustainable governance and management

As we mentioned at the beginning of this guide, sustainability is a very broad and complex concept that encompasses not only environmental care, but also social and economic issues. Although the Sustainable NGOs project places special emphasis on the work that youth NGOs can do to improve the aspects most closely related to environmental care, we did not want to overlook the issues that we consider equally important.

In this chapter, we want to explore three important topics that often might go unnoticed, but are essential for achieving significant social and economic change. We believe that taking these aspects into account will not only strengthen organizations, but also ensure that they can continue their valuable work in the long term, driving change towards a kinder and fairer society in the communities they engage with.

We will provide a brief overview of good practices in mental health, inclusion and financial sustainability, and offer a number of resources that we think can be used to explore these issues in more depth.

Recognizing the limitations of this guide as a starting point, we encourage you to continue to explore the broad spectrum of the term sustainability, remembering that your efforts and creativity are powerful tools to address the unique challenges you and your organisation encounter on your journey towards a more sustainable, inclusive and fair world.

Mental health . . . .

> *"We all have times when we feel down, stressed or frightened. Most of the time those feelings pass, but sometimes they develop into a mental health problem like anxiety or depression, which can impact on our daily lives. For some people, mental health problems become complex, and require support and treatment for life."* [11]

NGOs have an important responsibility to protect, promote, and enhance the mental health of their workers—to pay close attention and try to gain an understanding of the issues and be prepared to offer support for those struggling with mental health. Employers also have a legal responsibility to deal with the risks to physical and mental health of their workers. The workers can be often exposed to stress caused by a variety of factors such as monotone tasks, overly demanding challenges and excessive workload or even fear of losing their position. The consequences of mental health issues of workers can lower their performance, motivation, cause absence from work (sick leaves, burn-out), higher staff turnover and lower quality of staff. Instead of waiting for the mental health problems to arise, NGOs can integrate the right interventions and prevention measures, such as promotion of the lifestyle awareness and behavioral factors that can influence the onset of mental problems/illness. [12] [13] [14]

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[11] Mental Health Foundation. https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/explore-mental-health/publications/how-support-mental-health-work

[12] Duševno zdravje na delovnem mestu (NIJZ, 2018). https://nijz.si/publikacije/dusevno-zdravje-na-delovnem-mestu/

[13] Regional Health-Europe TL. Protecting the mental health of youth. Lancet Reg Health Eur. 2022 Jan 10;12:100306. doi: 10.1016/j.lanepe.2021.100306. PMID: 35059684; PMCID: PMC8758917. https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8758917/

[14] OIN ACTION – Mental Health and Wellbeing. https://mentalhealthandwellbeing.eu/

Some basic tips on taking care of the mental health of youth workers and help them thrive:

1. Since especially young people often begin their work with less understanding and experience of what to expect, it is important to help them face the kind of pressures they might not be used to.

2. NGOs can offer their workers information on their rights regarding their (mental) wellbeing at the workplace. Furthermore they can encourage personal development—provide training to help develop social and emotional skills (e.g. self-awareness) to recognize the problems in themselves and around them and react appropriately. NGOs can also offer support on how to manage the stress related to a specific workplace or a position.

3. Leaders should try to establish an inclusive and safe space for the workers to speak up and express their struggles. The work stress can be balanced by positive experience—staff being included and recognized as valuable, creative members of the work team and receiving positive feedback and encouragement from their coworkers and superiors.

More information on the topic and useful tips can be found:

Duševno zdravje na delovnem mestu (NIJZ, 2018), Slabemu počutju sem kos (NIJZ, 2021), Mental Health at Work (WHO) and Mental Health at Work (Mind), № 84. La salud mental de las personas jóvenes en España | Injuve, Instituto de la Juventud, SALUD MENTAL JUVENTUD.qxd (injuve.es), DepreHub (Romania)

Inclusivity

It is vital for youth NGOs to foster an environment, both within and outside the organization, that is inclusive for all. This can be achieved by adopting inclusive communication practices which means communicating with verbal and visual content that considers human rights—avoids discriminatory language, promotes inclusivity, ensures the accessibility of information for individuals with different profiles and specific needs and helps to prevent the spread of stereotypes and prejudices.[15]

Some valuable tips to consider:

1. Use a language that is broadly understood (not excluding people with low education or knowledge of other languages).

2. Pay attention to the correct terminology and different formats appropriate for different disabilities.

3. Consider gender equality, migrant people, Roma people, people with disabilities, and LGBTQIA+ community.

4. Remember communication has the power to change attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors!

[15] MANUAL: Accessible and inclusive communication guideline (2023). https://www.geyc.ro/2023/05/publication-manual-accessible-and.html

Important!

As a leader of an NGO you should ensure equal treatment of all the team members, you can introduce worker satisfaction surveys, be open to criticism and suggestions, make sure to inform your team about any major upcoming changes and offer the possibility of participation and accept proposals about important decisions!

More information on the topic and useful tips can be found:

Accessible and Inclusive Communication Guideline (GEYC and partners, May 2023), GUIA PRÁCTICA LENGUAJE INCLUSIVO (Chrysallis, 2020), Guía básica sobre gordofobia (Instituto Canario de Igualdad. Gobierno de Canarias, 2020), Recursos sobre antigitanismo (Fundación Secretariado Gitano).

Financial sustainability . . . .

Every organization requires consistent and dependable financial resources to execute its activities, grow, and fulfill its mission. For (youth) NGOs, achieving long-term financial stability can be particularly challenging. While there is a variety of funding sources available, ranging from grants, public donations (like those from personal income tax), to corporate sponsorships and partnerships, these funds can often be short-lived, sporadic, or earmarked for specific projects. Additionally, they might not cover certain expenses, such as administrative costs. Relying heavily on the private sector or the government funding can also pose challenges, including potential loss of independence and conflicts of interest.[16][17]

It is important to firstly, have a clear overview and understanding of the current financial situation, the challenges and opportunities; secondly, set the objectives and goals (e.g. for 3–5 years) for the future; and thirdly, develop a plan to achieve these goals. Financial strategy is usually an important part of the NGOs strategic plan.

Some valuable tips to consider:

1. Stakeholder support—build and nurture a positive relationship with stakeholder communities and make sure there is a proper understanding of the value of NGO contributions to society also among the political bodies responsible for providing the funding from public resources.

2. Diversified funding resources—relying on more than one source of funding provides safety and better financial security. Rely on grants, donations, but do not forget income-generating activities!

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[16] M. Camara, D. Chatto, Sustaining Your NGO's Mission: A Roadmap to Financial Sustainability Humentum.org. https://humentum.org/blog-media/sustaining-your-ngos-mission-a-roadmap-to-financial-sustainability/

[17] Plan B za Slovenijo – Financiranje okoljskih NVO (82023). https://planbzaslovenijo.si/nevladne-organizacije-in-predstavniki-javne-uprave-skupaj-o-financiranju-nvo-s-podrocja-okolja-narave-prostora-podnebja-in-trajnostne-mobilnosti/

3. Flexible funding—grant and donor funding can often be restricted to use for specific activities, whereas unrestricted funds can be used for different purposes in line with the mission and changing circumstances. When searching for funding, it must be appropriate to the aims of the organisation and to its stage of development.

4. Financial reserves—in case of unexpected events (e.g. a delayed grant, unforeseen expenses etc.), the reserves will help the organization to maintain the stability and carry out its activities uninterrupted until the situation gets resolved.

Important!

Do not forget to invest in staff, technology, and infrastructure to ensure effective operation, development, and professionalization of the organization.

More information on the topic and useful tips can be found:

EU Commission - **Funding opportunities for NGOs**, **FundsforNGOs**, CNVOS on **sources of funding**, fundraising and **useful know-how**, Youth and Environment Europe - **Guides for youth NGOs** (2016) on strategic planning, sustainable project management etc.