

STEP 3 Identify Priorities

Units that successfully integrate sustainability into their strategic plan are able to find the “sweet spot” where internal abilities meet external opportunities. This convergence of internal and external realities is where a unit will discover its unique contribution to Penn State’s sustainability vision. When you have completed this step, you will have:

- An understanding of how sustainability challenges impact your unit
- A list of potential strategic priorities in sustainability

Strategy Starts With Looking Outside

Strategic sustainability starts with a look at the sustainability challenges that have the greatest impact on an organization—and that are most impacted *by* that organization. For example, if you are a unit that generates a lot of waste, you may want to focus on waste minimization strategies. Likewise, if you are at a campus in or near an urban area and in a unit that works directly with students, you may want to create learning opportunities for students to engage with urban sustainability challenges, such as food insecurity or affordable housing.

A unit can analyze how these challenges translate into risks and opportunities. Then the question becomes, “What will our

Tip for the Facilitator

This step may be the most challenging—and most important. Take some time to look over the graphic “Global Challenges” on the next page as it communicates a key message about how sustainability challenges present strategic opportunities. Be sure the team understands this concept before moving on. The sustainability *Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats* (SWOT) could either be done individually and then the group would come back together to share ideas, OR you could go through it as a whole group. Either way, eventually you will want to list the sustainability challenges, opportunities, threats, strengths, weaknesses, etc. on a whiteboard or sheets of paper. Again, make sure you have someone who can write down all the comments.

Above and beyond: Just doing this step is going above and beyond.

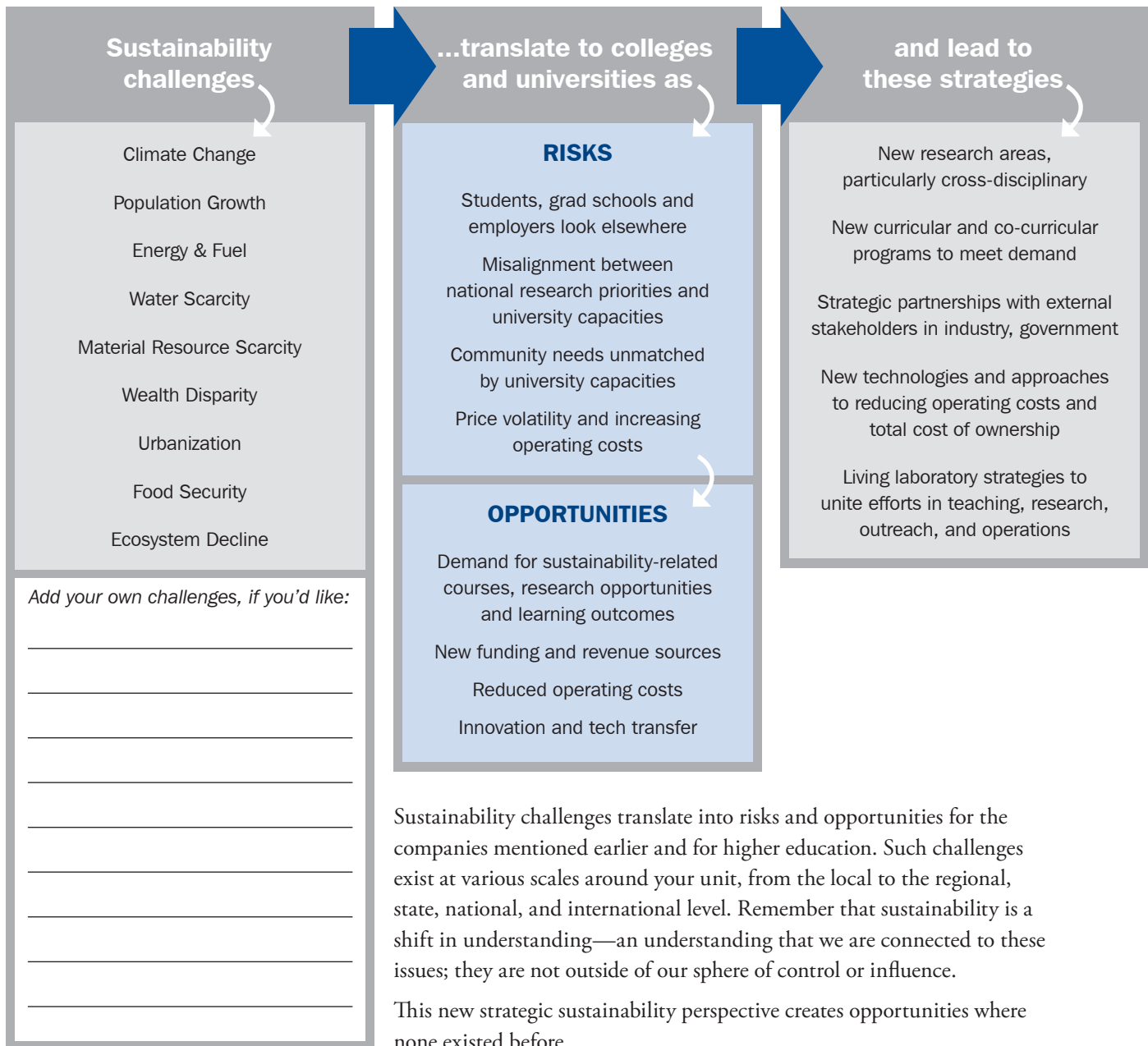
strategic response be?” Understanding sustainability challenges is key to the processes in this section. The table below is meant to provide further illustration of what is meant by “sustainability challenges” and how they matter to various organizations.

Company/Organization	Relevant Sustainability Challenges
Google	Energy use/renewable energy; digital divide
Nike	Material scarcity, waste management, and supply chain issues, including environmental and labor relations
Dow Chemical	Waste management in chemical manufacturing; toxicity of synthetic chemicals; renewable sources of chemicals
City of Philadelphia	Affordable housing, energy and emissions, food security, poverty

The graphic below presents a list of “sustainability challenges” that the consultant KPMG has put together. The list is not exhaustive, and your team is encouraged to add to it. It is a generic example of how sustainability challenges translate into

risks and opportunities for higher education. Also revealed are the potential strategies that could be employed to capture the opportunities and avoid the risks.

Global Challenges Lead to Strategic Opportunities for Higher Education⁸



Worksheet

Sustainability SWOT (sSWOT)⁹

The Sustainability SWOT developed by the World Resources Institute (WRI) is a way of identifying how an organization can recognize the opportunities embedded in sustainability challenges. The sSWOT begins with sustainability challenges and explores how their impacts flow through an organization, creating new value-adding ways to apply unique strengths to accelerate solutions to environmental and social issues. Use the Opportunity Finder report to help inform the discussion.

Go through the questions as a team, or individually first, then discuss as a team. Write your answers below.



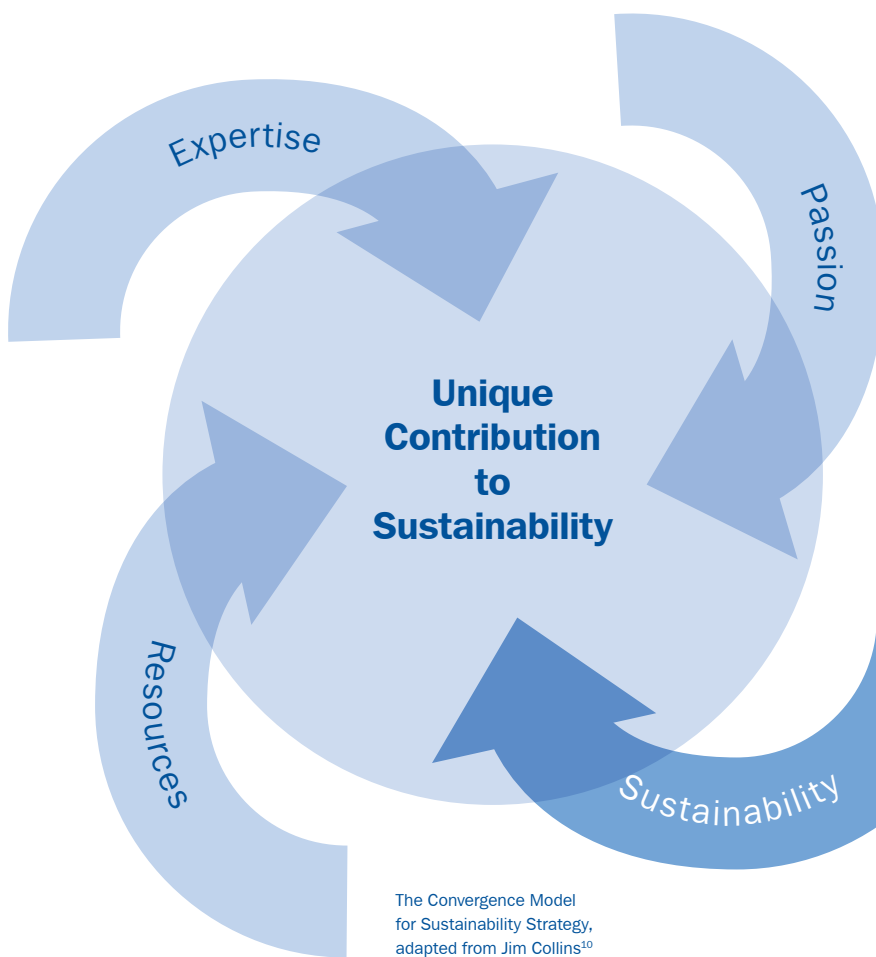
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____

Strategy Leverages What You Have on the Inside

Now that you understand the impact of these pressing global sustainability challenges, we will look more deeply at what unique expertise you have to help solve them—while driving more resources to your unit. We have developed a way for units to think about new sustainability opportunities in light

of their unique internal expertise, passion, and resource requirements. We call it the *Convergence Model*.

The purpose is to find a sustainability strategy that builds on your abilities, aligns with your passion, increases resources, and works to resolve societal challenges.



Description of the Convergence Model

Expertise: What is your unit really good at?

Pinpoint the unique expertise or ability where you could truly be the best at Penn State, in the country, in the world.

Passion: What does your unit really care about?

This is not a brainstorm of individual areas of interest, but an identification of what, at the end of the day, your unit really cares about collectively.

Resources: Where do your financial and other resources come from?

The university, and therefore each unit, must remain financially viable. For an academic unit, what ultimately determines your financial viability? For a cost recovery unit, what is your core business model?

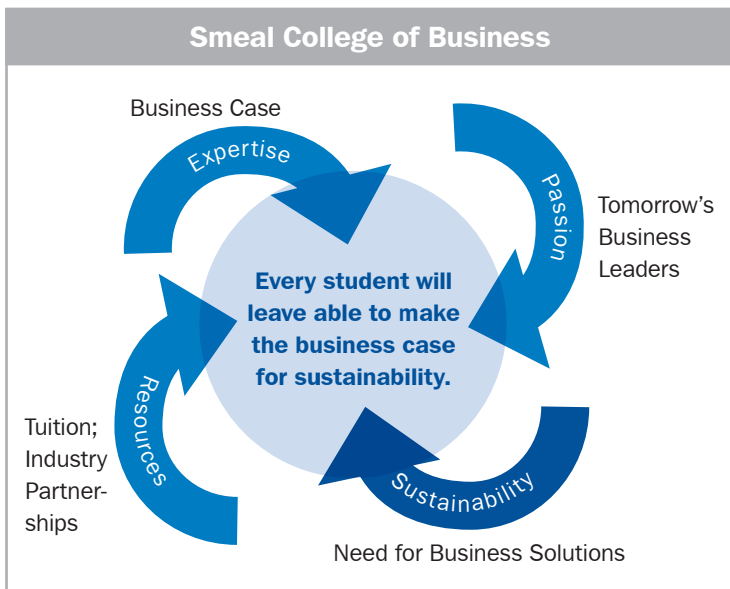
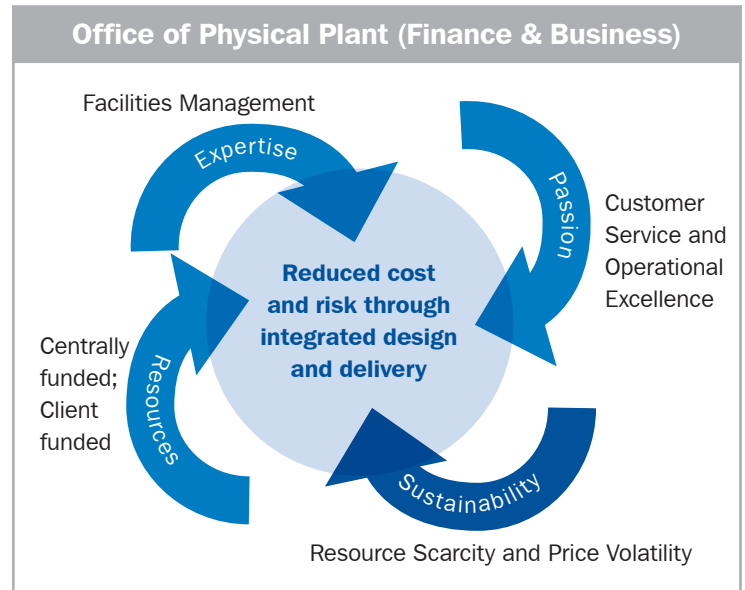
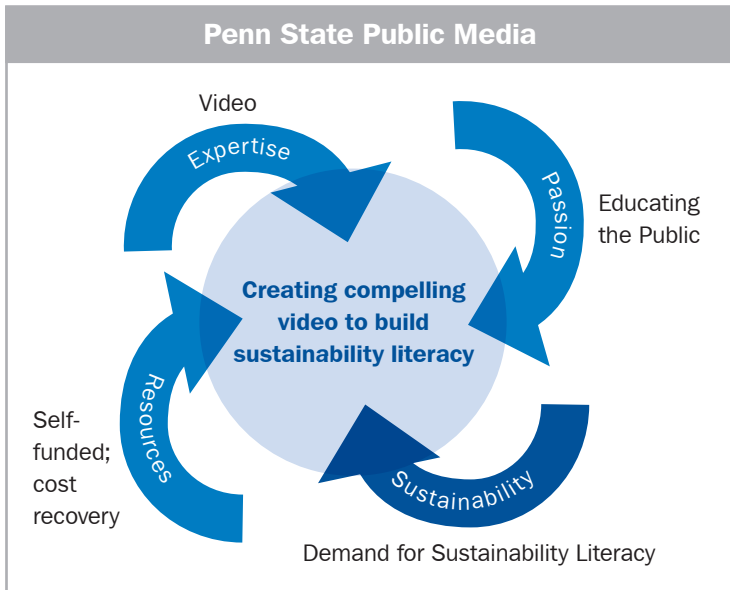
Sustainability: What does sustainability mean to your unit?

This is where you plug in the result from Step 1: how sustainability connects with your unit mission and expertise.

A worksheet on page 22 will help you go through the model. First, let's take a look at some examples on the facing page...

¹⁰Collins, J. C. (2001). *Good to Great: Why some companies make the leap – and others don't*. New York, NY: HarperBusiness.

Some Examples of Convergence From our Pilots



After looking outside at sustainability challenges, a look inside starts to suggest where a unit could make a significant contribution with benefits for society that also help to meet the unit's financial requirements. When both are satisfied, the result is a sustainable path forward.

Worksheet

Develop a Convergence Model: Write your conclusion for each factor in the corresponding boxes and see where the convergence happens for your unit. Refer back to the description of the four factors and the examples provided on previous pages.

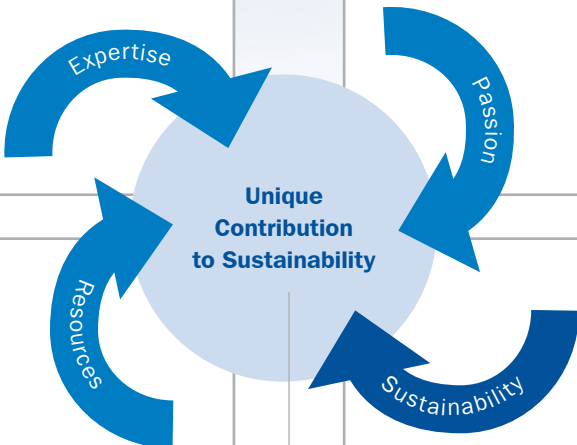
What is your unit really good at?

What does your unit really care about?

Where do your financial and other resources come from?

What does sustainability mean to your unit?

Write a statement that summarizes what you learned:



Before You Go On!

Go back to page 5 and write your conclusions in *Step 3*.