

Manitoba Council for International Cooperation—*Self-Assessment of Sustainability*

Tool at a glance

Title: Self-assessment of Sustainability

Addresses: Sustainable business (organizational) practices

Pertains to greening: Operations, Policy, Communications and Programming



Overview

The [Manitoba Council for International Cooperation \(MCIC\)](#) is a coalition of Manitoba-based organizations involved in international development. Its mission is to support, connect and amplify the work of its members and partners, while directly engaging and collaborating with Manitobans for global sustainability. MCIC develops and delivers tools, resources, and assistance designed to help Manitoba schools and educators contribute to international development, the United Nations' [Sustainable Development Goals \(SDGs\)](#) and fair trade. MCIC is also responsible for distributing Government of Manitoba funds designated for international development and humanitarian projects. MCIC's vision is "A Just World."

MCIC understands sustainability to be a balance of four pillars: economy, environment, culture, and social structures. MCIC follows the [1987 Brundtland Commission's](#) "Our Common Future" definition of sustainable development as "development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs." The SDGs are important to MCIC's understanding of sustainability and provide focus for priority areas of sustainability. While all goals are important, MCIC aims to give particular attention to Gender Equality. Sustainability is a spectrum, where gradual and continual changes are possible.

MCIC's goal in developing a sustainability self-assessment and subsequent sustainability critical path is to minimize negative cultural, social and environmental impacts of the organization's functions and activities while operating within the present financial resources of the organization and planning for organizational resiliency. MCIC is currently undergoing a process to create a tool for its own self-assessment of sustainability and will then follow a process of developing a critical path to become more sustainable over time.

Improving Organizational Sustainability at MCIC

The problem

While MCIC employs many sustainable business practices already, these practices are not documented in a formalized way, and as such, are not reviewed or tracked for progress toward goals. The questions MCIC sought to answer are whether it is operating according to sustainable business practices, and how can it ensure it is moving in the right direction over time.

Moving towards a solution

MCIC recognized the importance and need for sustainable business (organizational) operations and processes. It aims to contribute positively to its community and more broadly to teach businesses and the broader public about the SDGs and how taking action towards them is an essential aspect of MCIC's mandate. MCIC emphasizes modelling sustainable actions. Inventorying its own sustainability practices and developing a critical path for sustainable business operations will enable MCIC to improve its sustainability and share lessons learned with members, partners and the public more generally.

The need for a self-assessment of sustainability arose from internal discussions about opportunities for MCIC's new Sustainability Specialist to educate organizations and businesses about sustainable business operations—these internal conversations then turned into self-reflection. MCIC determined it would be desirable for it to work toward sustainability internally while sharing lessons learned rather than teaching others about tools or processes that should or could be used that have not been tried internally first.

Self-Assessment of Sustainability

MCIC's internal sustainability assessment is holistic. All businesses and organizations have an impact on the environment and the communities in which they operate—and beyond. MCIC aimed to design a mechanism that inventories its sustainability initiatives to formalize a plan to set sustainability goals (e.g., reduction of annual paper consumption), manage initiatives and monitor progress toward the set goals.

MCIC began with a scan of existing sustainability assessment tools. MCIC's Sustainability Specialist looked at a variety of sustainability assessment programs for general businesses and organizations, not specific to civil society, and used these to inform the structure of MCIC's sustainability self-assessment question set. The four general areas of assessment include physical infrastructure, internal operations, external operations and risk management. The question set is a series consisting mainly of yes or no questions about specific processes, actions, etc., that, once completed by MCIC, will inventory the organization's current practices and indicate whether it already has appropriate sustainability mechanisms in place. This information will be presented internally to MCIC staff, which will then be instructed to annually review practices, and join together to determine priority areas for continual work toward sustainability. Once priority areas are identified by MCIC staff consensus, MCIC's Sustainability Specialist will prepare a critical path indicating goals, targets, indicators, tools to be used, internal responsibilities and timelines. Among other sources, MCIC will draw upon the [Future Fit Business Benchmark Action Guide](#), which links business actions to the SDGs.

Results

Once it has completed the sustainability self-assessment process in its entirety, MCIC will have a documented inventory of its current sustainability initiatives and a formalized plan to make future improvements. This will result in MCIC's continued work to be a sustainable organization and allow it to have better insight into educating on sustainability and sharing lessons learned with others.

Next Steps

MCIC's self-evaluation question set is currently in formation stage. Once the questions are selected, MCIC will complete the internal assessment sharing results with staff for review and discussion. As this is a priority sustainability project, the expectation is that the self-evaluation and assessment will be completed in 2020. A subsequent phase will consist of determining next steps for the year to follow.

Insights and Lessons Learned

- Many sustainability self-assessment tools available to general businesses/organizations are part of paid marketing programs. This limits access to organizations seeking such tools and information.
- Many existing sustainability self-assessments and greening tools are highly specific and specialized for one area of operations or another (e.g., human resources, environmental resource management) and do not sufficiently cover the four pillars of sustainability as outlined above. Other tools are designed for specific industry use that do not apply to general civil society organizations in Canada.
- A sustainability management plan and existence of an internal green team are common criteria as a basis for sustainable business operations.
- It is important to model sustainable business operations as an organization that supports, encourages and educates about the SDGs, gender equality and fair trade.
- There is value in internal recording and reporting on sustainability initiatives. It is difficult to know if an organization is making progress on sustainability performance if efforts are not recorded.

Sources

- The self-assessment is not currently available to the public. However, MCIC aims to share insights and lessons learned with members, partners and the general public.
- Future Fit-business, <https://futurefitbusiness.org/>