



Guide to incorporating the Sustainable Development Goals into research at U.S. universities

This resource guide presents options for universities to incorporate the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) into their research activities by assessing how they align with the SDGs and implementing programs based on those findings.

It is a part of a series of guides for U.S. universities interested in engaging with the SDGs. The full series can be found [here](#).

Getting started: Assess how the SDGs are addressed through research at your university

Three ways that you can explore how the SDGs are addressed through research at your university are manual reviews, automated tools, and surveys. These approaches are most effective when they are employed together as complementary efforts. As the SDGs are broad, starting your analysis at the more descriptive [SDG target level](#) can help capture the granularity of your institution's research activities. Keep in mind that this process can be just as valuable as the final product. You will likely uncover unexpected connections, identify possible opportunities for action, and connect with potential allies across your institution to close sustainability gaps.

Approach 1: Manually review faculty profiles to map how their work aligns with the SDGs	
Benefits	This process does not place an additional burden on faculty who may not have time to be involved in the initial assessment of their work.
How to get started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Obtain a list of faculty and review their publications and websites to determine which SDGs you think are most relevant to their work. • Establish guidelines to standardize your assessment, especially if more than one person is involved in the review. For example, which activities count as research? Should there be a cap on how many SDGs are connected to a single faculty member? It can be harder to determine where there is more or less activity across the SDGs if research is connected to too many of them. • Consider engaging students in the analysis, which can spark excitement for the SDGs within the student body.

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Support for this publication was provided by the UN Foundation as part of [American Leadership on the Sustainable Development Goals](#)

Approach 2: Use an automated system to analyze how research publications align with the SDGs	
Benefits	This process saves a significant amount of time and effort. Some tools can also create tables and infographics to help communicate the results.
How to get started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Check with your library colleagues to see if your university subscribes to any research database services that include an SDG mapping tool. Some examples are SciVal, made by the academic database Scopus, and Dimensions, a Digital Science product.

Approach 3: Engage faculty to assess alignments with the SDGs through surveys, interviews, and/or group discussions	
Benefits	Faculty know their own work best, so this process is likely to yield a more accurate analysis.
How to get started	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider joining existing departmental meetings to inform faculty about the SDGs and provide a few examples of how some faculty or universities are employing the SDGs in their research. Design a survey to ask faculty how their work aligns with the SDGs. Organize individual interviews or group discussions for faculty to share and discuss how their work is contributing to the SDGs. This can uncover previously unknown connections between faculty research areas. You can also present the results from any manual or automated mapping you performed so that faculty can confirm your assessment as a part of this process.

Next steps: Implement programs that meet your university’s goals

Based on this analysis, you can explore programming options that meet your institution’s goals for engaging with the SDGs. Here are some examples of what other U.S. universities have implemented.

Centralize research analysis	Identify a centralized mechanism for faculty to display how their research relates to the SDGs, such as Elements by Symplectic .
Establish small grant programs	Establish small grants programs for research conducted by students, faculty, and staff that contribute to the SDGs in order to foster cross-disciplinary cooperation, such as the UC-Davis grants for advancing the SDGs .
Organize symposia	Organize symposia and conferences to bring together researchers working on different aspects of the SDGs to make connections across disciplines, such as Carnegie Mellon University’s INTERSECT Conference .