

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

M.S. Sustainability Management

Integrative Capstone Workshop Summer 2023

Kristen Tadrous | Valentina Munoz | Tristan Fischer | Ian Galinson | Siani Brown |
Kyle Jacobs | Kayley Beard | Yaowen Ma | John Blackburn | Rheanna Henney |
Zach Venning

Faculty Advisor: Kizzy Charles-Guzman

August 2023

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Index

Executive Summary..... 3

Introduction..... 4

Methodology..... 6

Recommendations..... 9

Measuring Success..... 19

Conclusion..... 22

Acknowledgments..... 24

Endnotes..... 26

Appendix..... 28

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Executive Summary

Seaside Sustainability, a nascent, environmentally focused nonprofit, works closely with school administrators, students, and community partners to provide guidance on how to implement sustainable practices within their schools. Through this Capstone Workshop, the Columbia Team has identified a substantial gap between schools, their infrastructure, and the implementation of sustainability programs. Seaside seeks to bridge this gap through consulting, and to better understand the driving factors and challenges for schools to propel sustainability initiatives forward.

Seaside has asked the Columbia Capstone Team to 1) analyze its existing Client Self-Assessment to determine how the assessment can be improved, 2) determine key factors that influence schools to pursue sustainability, including the stakeholders involved and the procedural challenges schools face, 3) identify grants that enable Seaside's consulting team to provide its services to schools with lower levels of funding, and 4) aid in marketing to increase Seaside's present and future client base.

To develop this Strategic Consulting Plan, the Capstone Team conducted extensive research, including K-12 and higher education staff interviews, Seaside client interviews, a survey of school sustainability processes and challenges, current Seaside consulting approach analysis, and marketing and grant analyses. The Team's goal in conducting this research was first to gain a better grasp of the challenges schools face in implementing more sustainability programs, and then to analyze Seaside's existing consulting processes in order to make recommendations on how updated strategies could better support the organization's mission.

To optimize Seaside's consulting business plan, the Capstone Team crafted a series of actionable recommendations regarding consulting content, client interaction, and service implementation. The Team believes that implementing these recommendations will supplement Seaside's business, helping to attract new clients, and identifying future funding opportunities. Ultimately, this report serves to elevate Seaside's ability to inspire and educate the next fleet of climate champions.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Introduction

Seaside Sustainability

Seaside Sustainability, a Gloucester, Massachusetts-based nonprofit, was founded in 2016 to educate and provide best practices for individuals and communities to support the world's oceans and waterways. In recognition of its efforts, Seaside has been awarded the Excellence in Energy and Environmental Education by the Massachusetts Office of Environmental Affairs in each successive year since 2019.¹ Seaside maintains six arms:

1. Green Scholars
2. Legislation & Advocacy
3. Marine Science and Education
4. Climate Action
5. Sustainability Consulting
6. Blue Technology

The common theme among all six of Seaside's focus areas lies in education and action. In the coming years, Seaside hopes to expand one of its arms in particular: sustainability consulting. Supporting and planning for this expansion became the Capstone Team's project focus.

Seaside Sustainability Consulting

Seaside seeks to improve sustainability efforts and initiatives for schools and, to a lesser extent, small businesses through its consulting services. Sustainability signifies an equilibrium between current and future resource use; the present cannot and should not infringe upon the future.² Seaside provides value by bringing this principle to the local, institutional level.³

The primary objective of Seaside's consulting arm is to help foster green schools. Seaside's consulting team partners closely with school administrators, students, and community partners, to provide guidance on how to implement sustainable, environmentally conscious practices through education and action. Through student involvement, the organization's ultimate goal is to encourage the development of environmentally conscious, global citizens whose actions extend outside the school into the community.⁴

Consulting Approach

To facilitate a green school transition, Seaside consults with educational institutions using three guiding tenets of on-campus sustainability: environmental consciousness, social justice, and economic viability. The current program offers operational recommendations, such as energy efficiency upgrades or water conservation strategies. Seaside's consulting approach also looks at school curriculum design. Depending on current curricula, Seaside may assist in designing more earth science, sustainable development, or environmental policy courses. Finally, Seaside promotes service learning as an opportunity for students to become more environmentally aware, and for educational institutions to connect with the world around them, facilitating greater sustainable, community collaboration.⁵

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Seaside uses a self-assessment to begin its consulting process. This assessment is not only based on economy, society, and environment, but it is also modeled in accordance with the US Department of Education's [Green Ribbon Institution Award](#) (See Appendix Item 11). The self-assessment operates like a gap analysis. For example, it identifies where footprints and costs can decrease, and where community health and wellness can increase. The self-assessment evaluates ten sections:

1. General Information
2. Energy Consumption
3. Food Services & Nutrition
4. Water Consumption & Management
5. Building & Grounds
6. Waste Reduction & Diversion
7. Bussing & Transportation
8. Curriculum & Student Learning
9. Administrative Culture & Mission
10. Overarching Observation

Key Challenges

As a small and nascent nonprofit that relies on fundraising and grants, Seaside faces several barriers to expanding its consulting services. Sustained funding poses the largest challenge. From a client perspective, maintaining a positive return on investment (ROI) while also acquiring the necessary funding to support a sustainability consulting service can be difficult, especially for public, educational institutions (See Recommendation 3). Further, consulting services require meeting clients where their needs are. An additional challenge for Seaside then lies in driving granularity in a select few focus areas by guiding clients through actionable recommendations. The Capstone Team's survey findings show that this hands-on approach will be particularly critical when addressing faculty sustainability expertise and conflicting priorities, as well as budgetary constraints (See Appendix Item 3.3).

Project Scope

With a focus on Seaside's consulting arm, the Capstone Team was tasked with reconciling these key challenges to help propel the organization's consulting services into the market. These tasks included:

1. Analyzing Seaside's Client Self-Assessment to establish any potential areas for improvement;
2. Identifying the key factors that influence school participation in and creation of sustainability initiatives, including factors related to stakeholder interests, and technical or procedural difficulties;
3. Researching grants that will provide Seaside sufficient operational funding and will provide schools adequate funding to hire consulting services;
4. Highlighting marketing strategies to expand Seaside's client reach.

Limitations

Originally, the Capstone Team's focus was on consulting service improvements for both educational institutions and small businesses. With agreement by Seaside's Founder and Executive Director, and given the project timeline constraints, the Team shifted its focus to schools alone. Additionally, the project timeline, lasting from mid-June to early August, limited how much primary research the Team could conduct, as interviews and survey responses required more time to collect. With schools on summer vacation, many campuses retained fewer active teachers and administrators. The project's scope was thereby narrowed in accordance with these restrictions.

Methodology

Adopting new sustainability initiatives can be daunting for any organization. The Capstone Team's approach to navigating this challenge blended primary and secondary research to form a holistic set of recommendations for the client. Using both forms of research granted the Capstone Team a wider breadth of information, enabling the Team to glean themes from direct engagement with schools, Seaside's network of team members and clients, as well as external, published reports.

The Capstone Team engaged in over five weeks of primary research to gather insights. The Team conducted secondary research from the project inception to the final drafting of this summary report. The results of the team's research are displayed in the report's recommendations section.

Primary Research

Client Relationship Mapping

As Seaside consults for a range of different educational institutions—public, non-public, religiously affiliated, and higher education—the Team first mapped key trends and relationships for each type of school. Relationship mapping displays the connectivity and flow of information between consumers, stakeholders, and service providers. Mapping enabled the Team to identify the primary factors that distinguished successful and unsuccessful initiatives at schools, inclusive and exclusive to sustainability. It also enabled the Team to create a comprehensive contact list, which was used to identify potential interviewees and survey respondents. In total, the contact list consisted of 45 individuals across 37 schools and three consulting firms. The contacts targeted for primary research consisted of heads-of-school, teachers, faculty, school oversight committees (e.g. board of directors), students, parents or sponsors of students, and sustainability subject matter experts.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Interviews

Over the course of the project, the Capstone Team conducted 17 interviews with members of school administrations to gather qualitative research to inform consulting recommendations. The interviews spanned across a variety of school structures, such as public, non-public, higher education, and specific learning disabilities (SLD) focused schools. These interviews were held in-person, over video conference, and over the phone. Each interview followed a specific format focused on uncovering the key factors that determine the success of initiatives or programs at schools. The Team devised the interview format, constructing a template to ensure a repeatable process (See Appendix Item 1). Team interviewers transcribed notes onto these templates, later extracting trends and quotes from interviewees for the report. These interviews translated primarily into Recommendations 1–6.

The Team also conducted two interviews with Seaside’s marketing team to assess needs and goals for marketing initiatives. The qualitative research from these interviews informed Recommendations 7 and 8.

Survey

To supplement the qualitative findings gathered from interviews, the Capstone Team developed an electronic survey via Google Forms, consisting of 13 questions that would provide quantitative backing to any identified trends or recommendations (See Appendix Item 3). The survey’s questions covered topics such as the top sustainability priorities over the next 12 months, the importance of different factors for project success, the most significant challenges faced in adopting sustainability initiatives, the key decision-makers involved, the evaluation criteria when selecting third-party consultants, and questions of funding and budgets. The electronic survey was live for over three full weeks and captured quantitative responses from 24 participants. 16 of the 24 participants were teachers, educators, or senior faculty members from public schools, constituting 67% of the study. The survey was instrumental towards all of the Team’s recommendations.

Secondary Research

Guidance Research

To support specific action items included with the recommendations, the Team scouted out reports and websites that offered guidance on sustainability toolkits and hiring practices, as well as online survey services. The Team used reports from the Aspen Institute and the U.S. Green Building Council to help shape many of its consulting service recommendations. The Team also compiled a suite of survey services that Seaside can choose to use in transitioning its self-assessment from a pdf to an online format.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Grants Research

To address the pivotal issues of funding, both internally and for clients, the Capstone Team researched existing grant opportunities that would enable Seaside to provide its consulting services to schools with lower levels of funding, and schools that may need additional financial assistance to integrate sustainability programs. The Team compiled all identified grants into one Grants Database for the client. Grant research primarily informed Recommendation 3.

The team analyzed 59 grant opportunities at several scales: federal programs, state programs, local opportunities, private funding, and innovation challenges. The team identified 12 federal grant programs from Sustainable School Grants housed in the Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Education, Department of Energy, and the Department of Environmental Protection. The team also located 24 regional, state, and local opportunities in the Northeastern United States, as that was the primary audience of Seaside's clients at the project's conception. The Team identified 36 grants from private, for-profit organizations that offered project-specific grants and opportunities through philanthropic foundations. Lastly, the Team found four innovation challenges hosted by large educational institutions and other private companies. These grants operate similarly to competitions. Seaside or its clients can participate in these challenges by developing sustainable education program ideas.

Grant selection centered around funding for sustainability programs in schools and ranged in opportunities from environmental education grants, field trip grants, energy efficiency solutions, healthy building programs, and sustainability program funding. The Capstone Team included additional filters in its Grants Database that distinguish eligible school types (K-12, Higher Education, Public Schools, Private Schools, Charter Schools, etc.), grant deadlines, funding amounts, and specializations.

Conference Research

The Capstone Team also hoped to provide in-person networking resources for Seaside to help grow its business. The Team therefore sought out green school-focused conferences, both nationally and regionally, that members from Seaside can attend in the future. The Team selected 3 conferences in particular to highlight. These conferences are embedded within Recommendation 7.

Mixed Research

Marketing

The final component of the project methodology focused on developing marketing approaches for Seaside, specifically to aid in client acquisition and brand strategy. Marketing research primarily informed Recommendations 7 and 8.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Marketing research was both primary and secondary in scope. The Capstone Team conducted two research calls with Seaside's marketing team and reviewed the organization's marketing to-date. Since Seaside already maintains two social media marketing interns who oversee social media and web operations, the Capstone Team focused on developing private marketing documents that Seaside can use toward client acquisition and branding. These materials can be shared virtually and/or during initial conversations with potential clients.

The Team also researched marketing-focused publications from consulting and analytics firms, such as PwC and McKinsey. Based on this research, the Capstone Team determined three critical deliverables to promote Seaside's consulting organization. These materials included a 1) promotional writing copy, 2) a pitch deck, and 3) a promotional video. The Team hopes that these outputs will not only facilitate deeper client understanding of Seaside's consulting service offerings and increase engagement through elevated branding, but that they will ultimately help to garner the most appropriate customer base for the emerging organization, fulfilling the Capstone project's objectives.

Recommendations

To address the challenges identified by the survey, interviews, and marketing research, the Capstone Team devised a series of evidence-based, actionable recommendations for Seaside to consider both internally and in collaboration with client schools. In developing these recommendations, the Team identified 8 core challenges encompassing school consulting, Seaside's client self-assessment, and client communication and management. The recommendations are organized as such. Additionally, each challenge includes a ranking of high, medium, or low to indicate level of suggested prioritization for Seaside's business optimization strategy.

Recommendations for School Consulting

Across the world, schools experience various outcomes for sustainability initiatives. UNESCO data from 100 countries demonstrates that only 53% of the world's national education curricula reference climate change.⁶ Even when referenced, climate change is given low priority, indicating major, global sustainability gaps. Creating and maintaining long-term sustainability programs becomes particularly difficult for schools, as programs must consider stakeholder interests and how to maintain sustainability initiatives after a student champion graduates. The Capstone Team's primary and secondary research identified five major challenges to establishing long-term sustainability programs for schools. In the following section, the Team crafted recommendations tailored to each of the five challenges, all of which should boost Seaside's ability to foster green schools.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Challenge (1): Schools struggle to maintain knowledge of and passion for sustainability as student champions graduate or depart.

Priority: Medium ★★☆☆

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Create a toolkit to facilitate student-led and teacher-coached sustainability alliances.** Offering defined roles and responsibilities for students and faculty in a toolkit format allows for a standardized process to maintain knowledge and passion around sustainability. The Aspen Institute’s [K12 Climate Action Educator Advocacy Toolkit](#) provides tips on how to build a toolkit, offering guidance on priorities like countering climate-related pushback in the classroom and establishing partnerships with school and community members to propel sustainability initiatives forward.⁷
- Implement environmental/sustainability stewardship and career development opportunities to engage students and foster alumni involvement.** Developing long-standing opportunities for students enables the continuation for sustainability programs beyond the tenure of an individual champion. [The National Environmental Education Foundation \(NEEF\)](#) is an example organization that connects educational experiences to environmental career paths.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> A senior attending a New England boarding school (School 1) successfully banned the commercial use of single-use plastic bags within the Academy’s town in Maine. Pursuing the ban was part of a senior-year project that the student self-selected. Once the senior graduated, the school had no champion to sustain action, and the initiative died.<input type="checkbox"/> At a private school (School 3), a representative shared that as students mature and their education level and interests evolve, they find it difficult to engage passions and keep sustainability in mind as they transition from middle school into high school. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> School 3, which pursued multiple sustainability initiatives, found that ensuring students across multiple grade levels remained engaged with sustainability was essential; if only seniors participate, the school is forced to recruit and educate new participants yearly.<input type="checkbox"/> Schools often experience sustainability initiatives in waves based on faculty tenure. School 2 achieved two successful sustainability initiatives thanks to the guidance of a former teacher. The first initiative was leasing a portion of the school’s golf course to a renewable energy producer, which produced revenue for the school and reduced the carbon footprint of the surrounding town. The second initiative partnered with a local food drive to provide fresh vegetables |
|--|---|

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

- At School 8, establishing a sustainability committee (with faculty, teachers, and board members) to maintain knowledge helps foster a green school. Support for this idea was initially low, but it has grown as potential committee members have been identified.

from a hydroponic garden. Both successful initiatives stopped after the teacher departed the school to become a sustainability consultant.

Challenge (2): Schools require greater awareness and expertise of sustainability opportunities to implement relevant initiatives.

Priority: High ★★★

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Produce client-facing material and customer testimonials highlighting the expertise and programmatic guidance that Seaside offers to school communities.** Sharing success stories will build Seaside’s consulting brand, contributing to client acquisition. Accenture, a leading business consulting firm, uses case studies to foster interest, such as with its Braskem project, [Powering an Actionable Climate Roadmap](#).⁸
- Provide schools with sample job descriptions to exemplify how sustainability should be displayed and considered during faculty hiring processes.** The U.S. Green Building Council not only examines why sustainability-focused hiring is important, but it also offers thorough examples of relevant job descriptions throughout its toolkit, [Making the Case for K-12 Sustainability Staff](#).⁹

Findings associated with the challenge:

- The Team’s survey found that 15 of the 24 respondents (63%) identified lack of expertise and know-how to implement initiatives as a significant challenge when implementing sustainability-related school program initiatives. This was the highest ranked challenge among the eight factors assessed in the survey (See Appendix Item 3.3).
- Schools 6 and 7 share that public and private schools default to a basic understanding of recycling and waste management due to the lack of

- The head of school at School 2 stated, “we are very focused on the student experience, and we need help identifying initiatives that would positively impact the students’ experience and enable a more sustainable school” (See Appendix Item 2).

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

in-house expertise around sustainability.

Challenge (3): Raising sufficient funding for sustainability consulting services and initiatives can be difficult while also needing to balance return on investment.

Priority: High ★★★

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Identify grant opportunities and competitions, help prepare grant proposals, and guide fundraising efforts for schools.** 88% of the Team’s survey respondents identified school budget size as a significant challenge when implementing sustainability-related school program initiatives (See Appendix Item 3.3). Seaside can direct the schools towards funding opportunities that are most suitable for each school’s location, sustainability goals, and funding capacity. Schools can directly apply for grants from regional organizations, private foundations, and federal agencies, including the Environmental Protection Agency (See Appendix Item 5). Individual students can also promote sustainability within their schools through innovation challenges like Stride Inc.’s [K12 Innovation Challenge](#) and the [776 Fellowship](#) for higher education.
- Subsidize consulting services for underfunded schools by applying for internal grant funding and by entering sustainable education competitions.** With budgetary constraints, consulting fees may pose a challenge for underfunded schools to contract Seaside’s consulting services. Seaside can apply for internal grants to be able to provide underfunded schools with an opportunity to use their consulting services, delivering an easier route for these schools to engage with and have support in understanding their sustainability goals. An example funding opportunity is from the [Devonshire Foundation](#), which awards grants to organizations working with youth, environmental sustainability and impact. These internal grants can also help to increase diversity and interest within Seaside’s client pool.
- Structure performance contracts for energy savings sustainability initiatives.** Performance contracts are an agreement between a service provider and a customer to recover the financing costs incurred over a utility payback period. Many energy consulting firms utilize performance contracts, and [The U.S. Department of Energy website](#) offers guidance on how to implement performance contracts.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- The Team’s survey found that the US Department of Education is the most commonly cited grant funding source, with 7 out of 24 respondents (29%) identifying as having used it within the
- Schools 1 and 2 want more local food to reduce their carbon footprint. Ultimately, though, schools find local sourcing of food is too cost-prohibitive, especially for

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

last three years (See Appendix Item 3.7).

- School 5 noted the implementation of sustainable solutions, such as solar panels and classroom light timers, requires additional financial support.

boarding schools that offer three or more meals to students every day.

Challenge (4): Aligning sustainability objectives with existing school missions and visions is not always simple or straightforward.

Priority: Medium ★★☆☆

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Provide marketing materials that demonstrate the benefits of sustainability-oriented decision-making processes.** In order to help key decision-makers at educational facilities understand the potential value and benefits of varied sustainability consulting services, Seaside should invest in marketing materials such as client case studies or online videos that detail example school pain points as well as solutions and outcomes delivered. The Team's survey found that 19 of the 24 respondents (79%) identified online resources and webinars as important or very important criteria when choosing a third-party provider to partner with (See Appendix Item 3.6). When placed behind an online registration form, the marketing materials can also serve as enticing collateral for client lead generation.
- Consult with schools' board members on how to best include sustainability within a school's mission and vision.** Involving schools' leadership in the transition towards building a green school forms a tight relationship between Seaside and the schools' decision-makers. While improving school curriculum, school habitat, and student well-being are examples of important factors cited by the Team's survey respondents, it is only direct interaction with school leaders that allows Seaside to better understand the specific needs and requirements of a school. Consulting with schools' leadership board members, whenever possible, will provide crucial context on how the mission and vision of the school can be translated into relevant sustainability programs.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- Multiple schools with successful sustainability track records (Schools 1, 2, and 3) indicated the need for a structured approach (either decidedly bottom-up or top-down) to sustainability that aligns with the school's mission and the student experience.
- The Team's survey found that the most commonly cited factor for determining the success of a school's sustainability program efforts was improved school curriculum. While 15 (63%) and 9 (38%) of the 24 respondents identified improved school curriculum as either important or very important, a similar

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

- A staff member from School 9 shares that board members are essential in furthering a school’s vision. Having engaged and supportive board members who promote sustainability and outdoor learning is helpful towards incorporating green values into the school’s mission.

number of respondents at 15 (63%) and 7 (29%) also identified high student participation rate as either important or very important for school sustainability program success (See Appendix Item 3.2).

- The [Center for Green Schools](#) offers examples of key methods and benefits of becoming a green school.

Challenge (5): Faculty and staff often do not have the bandwidth to engage in additional sustainability initiatives.

Priority: High ★★★

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Facilitate partnerships between schools and other institutions that offer trade classes pertaining to sustainable facility upgrades.** To further enhance the alignment between curriculums and sustainable facility upgrades, schools should look to establish partnerships with institutions that offer trade and construction classes such as those focused on electrical engineering. These partnerships strengthen the education community and can also help establish long-term relationships with early-career trade professionals who go on to join or establish their own businesses with an eye toward furthering sustainable practices.
- Engage local community members to expand the school’s bandwidth for and expertise in sustainability initiatives.** Schools are an integral part of local communities and often bring together diverse stakeholders across parents, teachers, students, vendors, and suppliers. Schools should look to their immediate community and member associations for opportunities to expand school influence and to bring together other businesses, institutions, and individuals that can provide additional resources, bandwidth, and expertise for sustainability efforts. For example, a food waste recycling and composting effort could be co-led or sponsored by a food catering vendor as part of its broader, corporate sustainability engagement efforts.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- A New England university’s dining facility, at School 4, instated a to-go, reusable container program in an effort to reduce single-use plastic. However, the food service staff required

- Charter and catholic school interviewees emphasized the limited capacity of staff, and the necessary financial justification for bringing on a

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

additional bandwidth to collect and clean all the containers, resulting in a stoppage of the program.

- A representative from School 2 shares that school facilities are aging and require the buildings and grounds team members to focus on keeping the buildings operational as opposed to spending time implementing changes to allow for a more sustainable campus.
- At School 2, maintaining commitment to sustainability hiring practices is critical towards identifying candidates who will foster sustainable thinking once employed.

new team member directly responsible for sustainability-related work.

- The Team's survey results revealed that a large number of stakeholders are typically involved in leading, planning, or managing sustainability initiatives. The most commonly cited individuals include school staff/teachers (17; 71%), student body (13; 54%), school leadership/principals (12; 50%), and facilities/operations manager (9; 38%) (See Appendix Item 3.4).

Recommendations for Self-Assessment

By scrutinizing Seaside's Institution & School Sustainability Self-Assessment form, the Capstone Team extracted a core set of findings that informed the following set of recommendations. The self-assessment requests a written, holistic assessment of a school's sustainability efforts while also asking for specific data points and calculations. The form is intended to foster interest in sustainability initiatives, specifically requesting to be filled out by students (with teacher oversight). Adjusting the tactics and format of the self-assessment may prove fruitful in helping schools realize their current sustainability baselines as well as any unrealized potential. These observations drive the recommendations that follow.

Challenge (6): Schools sometimes struggle understanding their own technical and facility baselines across consulting intake forms.

Priority: High ★★★

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Utilize a self-assessment to gather high-level, initial figures that can be used in the future to measure progress against baselines.** Throughout the form, institutions are asked to provide emissions, energy, etc., data reductions from a baseline. This assumes a baseline has been established to use in a future calculation determining any changes. Instead, the self-assessment should collect data from the client which will help calculate a Scope 1 and 2 GHG emission rate. The report should help the client conduct a basic energy audit without asking if one has been conducted. There should generally be more sections within the self-assessment that help create calculated numbers (e.g., the waste

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

section has a waste calculator to calculate the schools recycling rate). A self-assessment gathering high-level, initial figures allows for familiarity in structure and reporting, simplifying future reporting efforts.

- ☑ **Provide detailed instructions on how to obtain or measure each metric requested.** As observed in the Team's interviews, detailed guidance or instruction was not always provided in the self-assessment. Schools relied on rudimentary calculations such as those made within the waste section. Empowering the respondents with the ability to accurately capture metrics allows time efficiency and completeness to begin outlining project scope.
- ☑ **Optimize the self-assessment layout by including a glossary of advanced terms at the start and by leading with questions that capture schools' current efforts** (e.g., Seaside's Administrative Culture & Mission and Overarching Observations sections). 63% of survey respondents indicated that they significantly lack adequate sustainability expertise (See Appendix Item 3.3). A glossary of advanced terms can bring staff one step closer towards developing actionable goals. [The Aspen Institute's K12 Climate Action Report](#) exemplifies what such a glossary might look like.¹⁰
- ☑ **Enlist select champions to complete each section of the self-assessment so that responsibility is distributed equally.** Faculty bandwidth and student knowledge transfer are two challenges that continued to crop up over and over through the Team's research. For example, a private school in Massachusetts took the self-assessment and asked to reformat it into chunks. The school faculty and staff filled out the self-assessment. In other words, adults answered the questions. The students interviewed these staff members after the fact, but were not aware that the self-assessment had already been filled out. Distributing responsibility for the self-assessment's different sections to both staff and students can ease any bandwidth burdens and can ensure students keep learning about their schools' sustainability efforts. Sustainability champions can then include students as well as facilities staff, sustainability curriculum leads, and administrators.
- ☑ **Conduct the self-assessment on a web-based platform for a simpler input and tracking process.** Seaside's self-assessment is currently pdf-based, making it more difficult to fill out than an online survey platform.¹¹ Examples of useful web services include [Typeform](#), [Alchemer](#), and [Survey Monkey](#), among others.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ A contact from School 8 explains how it is difficult to assess food waste for self-assessment.☐ A representative from School 3 remarks that some of the questions that are in the guide could be used to create initiatives for schools if they do | <ul style="list-style-type: none">☐ A faculty member from School 3 shares that it would be beneficial to have questions tailored to elementary, middle, and high schools, respectively.☐ Schools which empower different learning styles, like School 3, desire more visuals and audio in learning |
|---|---|

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

not already have sustainability baselines.

content to enable participation across different learning styles.

Recommendations for Client Communication and Management

From conversations with Seaside’s marketing team as well as from secondary research, the Capstone Team identified a suite of challenges pertaining to marketing and client acquisition. These challenges are universal, but can be particularly difficult for nascent organizations. The Team devised the following series of recommendations to help Seaside reach its goal number of clients and gain greater public awareness.

Challenge (7): Active client outreach and identification is essential for service growth, though it is more demanding for smaller organizations.

Priority: Low ★☆☆

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- ☑ **Increase social media presence to foster organic discovery by potential clients.** 63% of survey respondents indicated that social media is either an important or very important aspect of selecting a third-party sustainability consulting service provider (See Appendix Item 3.6). For younger people, like the millennial generation, social media marketing is even more critical, with a 2019 Pollfish survey of 1,139 Americans demonstrating a link between social media content and a 54% increase in the likelihood a millennial purchases a product or service.¹² In other words, active social media engagement can be a beneficial component of brand marketing.
- ☑ **Target any topics identified as client priority areas for external marketing efforts.** Generalized marketing is better than no marketing. Targeted marketing, however, is a popular industry practice. Currently, many businesses are opting to utilize social media as a targeted advertising platform, with 29% of businesses exploring this option according to a 2023 HubSpot report.¹³ 28% of businesses also indicated using information provided directly from past customers and clients, offering a secondary benefit of Seaside’s self-assessment.
- ☑ **Pitch articles covering Seaside’s consulting services to local and/or national media outlets to increase awareness of the program.** Publications, news, and media outlets can serve as vital resources for expanding the reach of a company’s network. Specifically, academic and subject matter-related publications provide precurated, industry-specific audiences that can benefit from learning about the services Seaside provides.
- ☑ **Attend and speak at relevant industry events to network with professionals and any interested school officials, and to expand awareness.** Industry events provide an exceptional environment for consulting companies to interact directly with other

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

organizations, schools, academics, and industry professionals involved in and advancing work related to similar initiatives and projects. These platforms also provide free promotional opportunities for Seaside and its consulting arm.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- Examples of industry events include the more localized [7th NYC Green School Conference](#), the national [Center for Green Schools Conference](#), and the [North American Association for Environmental Education Conference](#).
- The Team's survey found that online resources such as webinars are one of the top two most frequently cited evaluation criteria that key decision-makers use when choosing a third-party provider to partner with (See Appendix Item 3.6).
- ESG consulting services are becoming so popular that many of them are starting to get acquired.¹⁴ In other words, the time to market is now.
- The Team's survey found that social media, and friend-of-a-friend referrals comprised 50% of the organic customer acquisition inbound pathways (See Appendix Item 3.10).

Challenge (8): Crafting client offerings and maintaining internal organization are important for streamlining consulting operations, but they require an upfront push.

Priority: Medium ★★☆☆

Recommendations to address the challenge:

- Create a suite of informational materials to give prospective clients so they can better understand the offered consulting services.** Distributing standardized, informational materials can help ensure that Seaside's mission, message, and scope are accurately expressed for all prospective clients or inquirers. Materials such as an informational slide deck, one-liner, and company blurb provide explicit, accessible, and detailed information that can be further built upon once connections are established.
- Utilize Excel, Google Sheets, or a customer relationship management (CRM) software to internally keep track of client information, including, but not limited to, point-of-contact, past discussions and relevant dates, client onboarding, client goals, associated project timelines, and revenue.** Staying organized with client interaction management can optimize Seaside's consulting services, and support more efficient client acquisition. Monitoring and management should take place at each stage of the client-consultant relationship to ensure effective operations from initial consultation through project implementation. CRMs provide the most robust services, but Excel and

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Google Sheets present affordable alternatives that can support Seaside in its immediate business growth.

Findings associated with the challenge:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> The Capstone Team spoke with Seaside’s marketing team and found that an internal, formal system for sharing materials and keeping track of clients would be helpful.<input type="checkbox"/> As CRMs help organizations scale up and improve client relationships, more and more organizations are opting to employ CRM services.¹⁵ | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><input type="checkbox"/> It’s beneficial to present a suite of product offerings similar to management consulting firms, like McKinsey, to initiate discussion with potential clients.¹⁶<input type="checkbox"/> Organizations often use third-party services (like Airtable, Monday, Google Sheets, and Excel) to keep track of client information. |
|--|--|

Measuring Success

Measuring success through key performance indicators (KPIs) is critical for benchmarking organizations of all types. Not only do KPIs ensure transparency for any necessary financial disclosures, but they also allow organizational leadership to assess its current progress against its stated goals.¹⁷ For a mission-driven organization like Seaside, KPIs can assure stakeholders that their visions are being met and that their investments are progressing smoothly.

KPIs are numerical measurements that also feed into marketing strategy.¹⁸ For example, KPIs can record how many unique individuals visited a web page, and reference the measurement against past performance. KPIs can also measure growth in client engagement, such as the percentage of prospective clients that contracted a given service. Growing organizations benefit from these types of measurements as they clearly and efficiently demonstrate progress or areas for improvement.

When developing new KPIs, it is important to do the following:¹⁹

1. Connect the KPI to organizational strategy;
2. Clearly define the KPI and any relevant calculations necessary for reporting;
3. State the KPI’s intended purpose;
4. Provide data sources, and any limitations or assumptions;
5. Identify relevant future goals;
6. Illustrate how the KPI’s data trends over time;
7. Benchmark data alongside any industry competitors.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

KPIs for Seaside Sustainability

Based on primary and secondary research, the Capstone Team devised a number of KPIs to help Seaside expand its consulting arm. The listed KPIs stem from what survey results and interview findings deemed important for the organization.

1. Number of inbound, outbound, and referral-qualified leads

Context: The Capstone Team's marketing research indicated that maintaining a client database is an important step towards organizational success. The same database can provide the data necessary to 1) capture and record key client information, 2) identify any client leads referred through Seaside's network, 3) distinguish the types of leads, and 4) record any prospective clients that declined consulting services.

Measure: These four measurements can be recorded separately as a percentage change over a given time period (e.g. month-over-month).

2. Win rate

Context: Win rate is a direct measure of the increase in clients served. This end-to-end measure is key to determining the number of prospects that ultimately become clients, meaning they contracted consulting services with Seaside. This supports the Capstone Team's project scope to help grow Seaside's consulting business.

Measure: This can be measured as a percentage of clients acquired out of all prospective clients, using the client database as a tool for capturing data.

3. Client Impact (Customer Satisfaction)

Context: Client impact measures both customer satisfaction and the tangible benefits provided to each client. A net promoter score (NPS) reflects how happy a client was with Seaside's service. Feedback can be gathered directly from post-consulting service surveys.

Measure: One method to measure feedback is to use a survey with a numerical scale ranging from 0 to 10 on how satisfied the client was with Seaside's services. An NPS score is typically calculated by subtracting the total number of scores of 6 or below (detractors) from the total number of scores of 9 or 10 (promoters).²⁰

4. Client Impact (Tangible Benefits)

Context: Tangible benefits reflect concepts like money saved and carbon emissions reduced (on the part of the client). Challenge 3 indicates the need to preserve a school's financial ROI. Challenge 6 demonstrates the necessity of guidance in reporting emissions. This KPI will not only record the financial successes gained from Seaside's services, but will also ensure that the organization is adequately instructing its clients on how to measure their emissions.

Measure: Tracking these changes at schools will require following up with past clients. Calculating cost changes in utility bills can serve as measures of money saved. Greenhouse gas accounting (or at the very least estimates) can clarify any changing trends in climate impact. The Team recognizes the challenges of capturing this metric due to school capacity limitations, as cited in Challenges 5 and 6.

5. Team Utilization

Context: Team utilization is a measure of team efficiency calculated by breaking down and analyzing Seaside team members' available hours versus how much time they spend on client engagements and projects. Challenge 5 indicated that school staff members often do not have the bandwidth to tack on extra sustainability work. Team utilization can track how efficiently Seaside consultants are filling in to increase staff capacity. This KPI can be especially useful when viewed alongside win rate.

Measure: Team utilization can be measured by recording the number of hours spent per advisor/consultant on each client engagement and project against the total number of hours worked.

6. Number of Grants Received to Partner with Low-Resource Clients

Context: This KPI speaks directly to the Capstone Team's objectives to identify a range of grant opportunities that would enable Seaside to provide its services to schools with limited funding. With the Capstone Team's survey finding that the US Department of Education (DOE) is the most commonly cited grant funding source, with 29% having used it within the last three years, the organization should also look to the DOE as a key resource for sustainability education grants in subsequent years.

Measurement: This can be directly measured by the number of grants won by the schools to directly partner with schools with limited funding.

Conclusion

Final Deliverables

Ultimately, this twelve-week project and partnership developed between Columbia University's Capstone Team and Seaside Sustainability culminated in the following deliverables, across the following workstreams. These are included in the Capstone Team's analysis, and in some instances, have been shared as separate files.

- 1) **Self-Assessment Reconstruction:** The Team created the strategies in Recommendation 6 for improving Seaside's self-assessment form, including its client engagement approach while consulting.
- 2) **Key Findings on Stakeholder Motivations and Challenges:** Stemming from the project's diverse stakeholder engagement process, survey and interviews findings about schools' motivations and barriers regarding sustainability adoption helped inform the majority of the Team's recommendations. In addition to identifying key challenges and providing relevant recommendations, the Capstone Team also built a contact list of 50 prospective clients across educational institutions of all backgrounds that will aid in future business growth.
- 3) **Grants Identification for Schools with Limited Funding:** The Team identified 59 grants across the public and private sectors that schools with limited resources may be able to access to use Seaside's consulting services. These have major equity and access implications for how Seaside engages with future clients to expand sustainability education's reach. A breakdown of these grants is captured in the Grants Summary (See Appendix Item 5). The Team developed strategies for the client in Recommendation 3 on how to best embed grants into its suite of services.
- 4) **Marketing Analysis and Lead Generation Toolkit:** The Team completed a marketing analysis and constructed a consulting toolkit for the client to optimize its consulting approach. This toolkit includes promotional written copy and digital assets like a pitch deck and promotional video to elevate Seaside's consulting brand and to recruit and retain clients.

A Commitment to Sustainability Management

Beyond the deliverables, the overarching issues the Team uncovered through this project's research revealed several implications for the future of sustainability management. From its core findings, especially regarding stakeholder engagement and grants research, the Team identified systemic issues around equity and access regarding sustainability adoption in schools. Funding is a key driver. These findings were also the most dire, reflecting the dearth of sustainability education across the United States, despite the urgency of green school transitions. Recognizing these gaps, given more time and resources, the Team believes that future research could benefit

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

from an emphasis on increasing access to sustainability education in schools with limited funding, whose students may be more vulnerable to climate impacts.²¹

Ultimately, sustainability education forms a foundational solution to combat climate change. With the youth most at risk of suffering the devastating impacts of climate change, early access to sustainability education is necessary to ensure students are well-equipped to adapt to an uncertain future. This project's overarching vision of scaling sustainability education supports a future where sustainability tools and knowledge become embedded in all facets of life and across all backgrounds. These impacts will fuel the talented, future professionals whose innovations will support and promote sustainable communities in the face of a changing climate.

Acknowledgments

The Team would like to first and foremost thank Eric Magers, Callie Steed, Sriti Singh, and the rest of the Seaside Sustainability team for sharing this project with Columbia University's Masters of Science in Sustainability Management program. We are thankful for their partnership throughout this journey and for the opportunity to contribute to such an important project.

The Team would also like to thank our Faculty Advisor, Kizzy Charles-Guzman, for her insightful guidance and support during the project.

In addition, the Team is deeply grateful to all the individuals who generously shared their expertise, completed the survey, and volunteered to be interviewed. The Team would like to thank:

- Alejandro Mundo, Teacher, Kingsbridge International High School
- Amanda Velez, Teacher, Urban Assembly School for Emergency Management
- Andi Twiss, Teacher, New Millennium Academy
- Billy Karis, Energy Consultant, Efficiency Vermont
- Daniel Bodenfors, Owner/Marketing, Bodenfors
- Denisse Manning, Alumni Relations, Gould Academy
- Doria Hillsman, Teacher, Spring Valley High School
- Edita O'Brien, Teacher, Curtis High School
- Elizabeth Luna, Teacher, North Babylon High School
- Erika Satfne, Teacher, Washington Heights Expeditionary Learning School
- Erin Carroll, Outdoor Learning Specialist, Durham Public Schools
- Freya Hore, Seaside Client (Student), The International School of Azerbaijan
- Heidi Bernasconi, Teacher, Clarkstown High School North
- Jack Henderson Adams, Business Owner, Western Earthworks
- Jean-Marie Woods-Ray, Teacher, Eastchester High School
- Jen Kuhns, Teacher, Landmark School
- Jenni Burton, Curriculum Supervisor, Collegium Charter

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

- Jonathan Young, Director of Corporate Relations, Virginia State University
- Joshua Fisher, Director of the Advanced Consortium on Cooperation, Conflict and Complexity, Columbia University Climate School
- Kenyon Trotter, Principal, Richmond Public School
- Kirsten S. Kleinman, Teacher, Nyack High School
- Laurel Zaima, Program Manager of Non-Degree Education and Outreach Programs, Columbia University Climate School
- Louise Cohen Micallef, Teacher, Georgetown Day School
- Max Fern, Student, Former Seaside Intern
- Mina Venning, Director of Military Instruction, Atlanta Public Schools
- Molly Fritz, Student, Former Seaside Consultant
- Montserrat Bosch, Associate Professor, Universitat Politècnica de Catalunya-Barcelona
- Patricia Tarquinio, Principal, Pope John Paul II
- Sara Whalen Shifrin, Associate Head of School Strategy and Talent, Gould Academy
- Sean Duncan, Head of School, The Winchendon School
- Stephanie Alston, Teacher, Charles Flowers High School
- Tamanna Shahid, Teacher, Eleanor Roosevelt High School
- Tamika Thomas, Teacher, Ronald Edmonds Learning Center
- Theron Stallworth, Director of the Office of Professional Standards, Memphis-Shelby County Schools
- Tiziana Susca, Researcher, Italian National Agency for New Technologies, Energy and Sustainable Economic Development
- Todd Chasteen, Executive Sous Chef, University of Maine
- Tom Mullane, Teacher, Pearl River High School
- William Russell, Teacher, Leonia High School

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Endnotes

¹ *Seaside Sustainability—GuideStar Profile*. GuideStar. Retrieved August 1, 2023, from <https://www.guidestar.org/profile/47-4993870>

² Brundtland, G. H. (1987). *Report of the World Commission on Environment and Development: Our Common Future* (A/42/427; p. 16). United Nations. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/5987our-common-future.pdf>

³ *Sustainability Consulting*. Seaside Sustainability. Retrieved July 26, 2023, from <https://www.seasidesustainability.org/sustainability-consulting>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Mallard, T. (2021, October 31). *Only half of the national curricula in the world have a reference to climate change, UNESCO warns* | UNESCO. UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/only-half-national-curricula-world-have-reference-climate-change-unesco-warns>

⁷ *Educator Advocacy Toolkit* (p. 3,5). (2023). The Aspen Institute. <https://greenstrides.org/sites/default/files/K12-EducatorAdvocacyToolkit-Screen.pdf>

⁸ *Powering an Actionable Climate Roadmap*. Accenture. Retrieved August 2, 2023, from <https://www.accenture.com/us-en/case-studies/consulting/powering-actionable-climate-roadmap>

⁹ *Making the Case for K-12 Sustainability Staff: A Toolkit for Success* (pp. 5–15). (2023). U.S. Green Building Council. <https://www.usgbc.org/sites/default/files/2023-05/Sustainability-Staffing-Toolkit-04-2023.pdf>

¹⁰ *Educator Advocacy Toolkit* (p. 14–15). (2023). The Aspen Institute. <https://greenstrides.org/sites/default/files/K12-EducatorAdvocacyToolkit-Screen.pdf>

¹¹ Best Survey Software: Top Tools for Gathering Valuable Insights. (2023, April 14). *Serchen*. <https://blog.serchen.com/best-survey-software/>

¹² O’Shaughnessy, T. (2021, August 3). *Marketing to Millennials in 2019 (New Survey)*. Clever Real Estate. <https://listwithclever.com/research/marketing-to-millennials-in-2019/>

¹³ *The State of Marketing: Marketing Trends in 2023, from AI to Z* (p. 10). (2023). HubSpot. <https://www.hubspot.com/hubfs/2023%20State%20of%20Marketing%20Report.pdf>

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

¹⁴ Nair, D. (2023, June 30). Carlyle to Take Over £400 Million ESG Consultancy Anthesis. *Bloomberg*. <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-06-30/carlyle-to-buy-control-of-400-million-esg-consultancy-anthesis>

¹⁵ Kulpa, J. (2017, October 24). *Council Post: Why Is Customer Relationship Management So Important?* Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbesagencycouncil/2017/10/24/why-is-customer-relationship-management-so-important/>

¹⁶ *McKinsey Sustainability: Innovating to net zero*. McKinsey Sustainability. Retrieved August 1, 2023, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/sustainability/how-we-help-clients>

¹⁷ *Guide to key performance indicators: Communicating the measures that matter** (p. iii). (2007). PwC. https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/audit-services/corporate-reporting/assets/pdfs/uk_kpi_guide.pdf

¹⁸ *Definition of Marketing Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)*. Gartner. Retrieved July 21, 2023, from <https://www.gartner.com/en/marketing/glossary/marketing-key-performance-indicators-kpis->

¹⁹ *Guide to key performance indicators: Communicating the measures that matter** (pp. 9–10). (2007). PwC. https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/audit-services/corporate-reporting/assets/pdfs/uk_kpi_guide.pdf

²⁰ Rimer, C. (2021, March 10). *Momentive: The 3 Customer Loyalty Metrics Every Leader Should Know—And How To Use Them Properly*. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/surveymonkey/2021/03/10/the-3-customer-loyalty-metrics-every-leader-should-know-and-how-to-use-them-properly/>

²¹ *Climate change is one of the biggest threats to education—And growing*. (2022, August 3). Concern Worldwide US. <https://concernusa.org/news/education-and-climate-change/>

²² Dahal, S. (2011). *Eyes don't lie: Understanding users' first impressions on website design using eye tracking* [Masters Theses, Missouri University of Science and Technology]. Curtis Laws Wilson Library. <https://www.mobt3ath.com/uplode/book/book-22438.pdf>

²³ Sillence, E., Briggs, P., Fishwick, L., & Harris, P. (2004). Trust and mistrust of online health sites. *CHI '04: Proceedings of the SIGCHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems*, 663–670. <https://dl-acm-org.ezproxy.cul.columbia.edu/doi/10.1145/985692.985776>

²⁴ Raita, E., & Oulasvirta, A. (2011). Too good to be bad: Favorable product expectations boost subjective usability ratings. *Interacting with Computers*, 23(4), 363. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.intcom.2011.04.002>

Appendix

ITEM 1: Interview Guide

Approach: Open-ended questions to gather insights, not solutions. After all interviews are completed, insights will be themed to begin “solutioning.” Questions will be chosen based on the flow of the conversation (not all questions will be asked in each interview). This guide is a foundation for a talk track for interviews. Depending on the persona being interviewed, the focus of the questions may vary (e.g., the facilities manager will focus on energy usage, operations, and buildings).

Personas: Heads of schools, teachers, faculty, facility managers, and alumni

Interview target time: 45 minutes

Introduction:

Interviewer: Thank you for taking the time to meet with us today. As I mentioned in my email, we want to understand better what influences schools' decisions. We are also looking to focus on how your school pursues sustainability and uncover any roadblocks or pain points in pursuing a new initiative at the school.

General Information:

[Interviewer gives a quick summary of what the Capstone team knows about the interviewee (role, tenure in education, length at current school, etc.) and information about the school (mission/vision, enrollment numbers, focuses, independent vs. private, etc.)]

1. Did we miss anything, or do you want to add more background about you or the school?

Past initiatives:

Success

1. Think of a successful initiative from the past which started from the ground up. What were the critical factors for its success?
2. Who started the initiative, and what relationship do they have with the school?
3. Who was involved in the decision-making process to move forward with the initiative?
4. How did the school measure the success of the initiative?
5. Was any funding required, and how was capital raised for the initiative?

Learnings

1. Now let's talk about an initiative that was a learning for the school, meaning not a big win.
2. What do you attribute to the initiative being a learning instead of success?
3. Looking back, how would you approach the initiative differently?

Sustainability:

Get the ball rolling

1. Where is the most significant opportunity for improvement from a sustainability lens at the school, and why is it the lead opportunity?
2. Is sustainability a factor in your school's decision-making process, and why or why not do you think it should be?

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

3. Has the school ever done a greenhouse gas inventory or energy audit?
 - a. If so, when and were there any resulting actions?
4. Can you share any specific challenges or resistance the school has encountered when trying to implement sustainability initiatives?
5. How has the school's understanding and approach to sustainability evolved over time?
6. Could you describe any sustainability policies or guidelines that are currently in place at the school?

Curriculum & Student Learning

1. What are the key factors your school considered before changing the curriculum?
2. How is sustainability addressed in the school curriculum?
3. Talk to us about how students select courses to take. What are the motivations for taking specific courses?
4. Can you share an example of a sustainability project or initiative integrated into the curriculum and its impact on the student's learning experience?
5. How are teachers equipped or trained to incorporate sustainability into their teaching practices?
6. How does the school ensure that sustainability education is inclusive and accessible to all students?

Food / Nutrition / Waste Management

1. Talk to us about the dining experience at your school, how many meals are served a day, who serves them, and what is the ratio of students bringing their own food vs. pay/food plan.
2. How would the students rate the food at your school?
3. How is food waste handled at your school? (Recycling, composting, compostable materials, etc.)
4. Outside of food waste, how is other waste managed?
5. Are there any initiatives to educate students about food waste or sustainable eating habits?
6. Are local or organic food options considered in the school's food plan?
7. How does your school deal with electronic waste?

Builds & Grounds

1. Is sustainability a factor for new buildings on campus?
2. What is the average age of the buildings on your campus?
3. Are there any efforts on campus for energy reductions, such as motion sensors, timers, etc.?
4. Can you provide examples of how the school has retrofitted existing buildings to improve energy efficiency or sustainability?
5. How are students and staff engaged in the sustainable management of the school grounds?
6. How does the school consider the local environment and ecosystem when planning new buildings or renovations?

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Business & Transportation

1. What are the modes of transportation for students and faculty (e.g., buses, vans, cars, flights, etc.)?
 - a. How have the vehicles been powered (electric, fossil fuels)?
2. How often are they needed? (day students vs. boarding students)
3. Can you share any specific challenges or resistance the school has faced when implementing more sustainable transportation options?
4. How do the school's location and surrounding infrastructure impact transportation choices?
5. Have there been any student-led initiatives or projects related to transportation and sustainability?

Energy Management

1. What are the energy sources for your school?
2. Given the location and size of your campus, have there ever been discussions of partnerships with energy providers around renewable energy sourcing or sale?
3. Can you describe any challenges the school has faced in managing its energy consumption?
4. How does the school balance the need for technology and equipment with its energy management goals?
5. How are students and staff engaged in the school's energy management practices?

Capital Raising

1. Walk us through your capital sources and how you raise funding.
2. Can you provide examples of successful sustainability initiatives funded through unique or innovative financing mechanisms?
3. How does the school balance the need for funding for sustainability initiatives with other funding needs?
4. Can you discuss any partnerships with businesses or the local community to secure funding for sustainability initiatives?

Consulting Relationships

Past engagements

1. Has your school used consultants in the past, and if so, how?
 - a. [If used] What were the selection criteria for the consultants?
 - b. [If used] Does your school issue requests for proposals (RFPs) for consultants?
 - c. [If not] What are the main reasons your school doesn't use consultants?

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

ITEM 2: Interview Summary

Below is a table summary of the Team’s 11 school interview respondents. Listed is the school type, job title of the individual interviewed, and the key takeaways from each conversation.

#	School Type	Job Title	Interview Summary
1	Independent	Faculty, Head of Innovation	-A senior successfully banned the commercial use of single-use plastic bags within the Academy’s town in Maine. Pursuing the ban was part of a senior-year project that the student self-selected. Once the senior graduated, the school experienced an absence of a champion to prompt new sustainability initiatives, and the initiative died.
2	Independent	Head of School	-“We are very focused on the student experience, and we need help identifying initiatives that would positively impact the students’ experience and enable a more sustainable school.” -Want more local food to reduce the school’s carbon footprint. Ultimately, though, schools find local sourcing of food is too cost-prohibitive -This school achieved two successful sustainability initiatives thanks to the guidance of a former teacher.
3	Independent	Faculty	-As students mature and their education level and interests evolve, schools find it difficult to engage passions and keep sustainability in mind as they transition from middle school into high school. -Sustainability track records indicated the need for either a bottom-up or a top-down approach to sustainability that aligns with the school's mission and the student experience.
4	Higher Education	Faculty, Executive Sous Chef	-Dining facility initiated a to-go food reusable containers program in an effort to reduce single-use plastic. However, the food service staff required additional bandwidth to collect, and clean all the to-go containers, resulting in a stoppage of the program.
5	Catholic	Faculty, Principal	-The school recognizes some of the opportunities available to make their practices more sustainable such as solar panels. They would require financial assistance of some public or privately funding to cover implementation and capital costs for such costly projects, as they are not feasible within the existing budgets. Sustainability consulting companies interested in working with parish schools would

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

			do well to establish a relationship with the Church before any work can be conducted.
6	Public	Faculty, Principal	-Sustainability is not being taught in schools because it is not a part of the Virginia DOE curriculum. There is a space and interest for it but significant assistance is required to cultivate. Development of community and parental materials would be beneficial in helping them understand what is happening, why, and how to be a part of the solution.
7	Charter	Administration, K-12 Curriculum Director	-Most sustainable initiatives on the building and grounds have been student-led and not endorsed by the school. They do send out RFPs often and would be interested in working with a sustainable consulting company. However, they would require an additional faculty member specifically responsible for such activities and clear financial justification for the services and salary of said staff member.
8	Independent	Student	-Sustainability is championed by faculty with an interest in sustainability. The school's mission statement empowers students to lead sustainability initiatives.
9	Public	Faculty, Outdoor Learning Specialist	-Board members are essential in furthering a school's vision. Having engaged and supportive board members who promote sustainability and outdoor learning is helpful to its incorporation into the school's mission.
10	Public	Faculty, Director of the Office of Professional Standards	-Works at 25th largest school system in the nation -While not a sustainability decision maker, the school does have programs for students that encourage sustainable student behaviors and resource conservation -A lot of schools are older with low hanging fruit opportunities for energy efficiency, maintaining good indoor air quality, and ensuring proper sanitation for safe educational environment -Focused on providing STEM, project-based, and community-based learning opportunities for students. Highlighted the need to ensure students are able to understand, formulate, and articulate perspectives around sustainability.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

ITEM 3: Electronic Survey Findings

Figure 1. Top School Sustainability Priorities Over The Next 12 Months

Please rank the following initiatives in terms of your priority over the next 12 months?

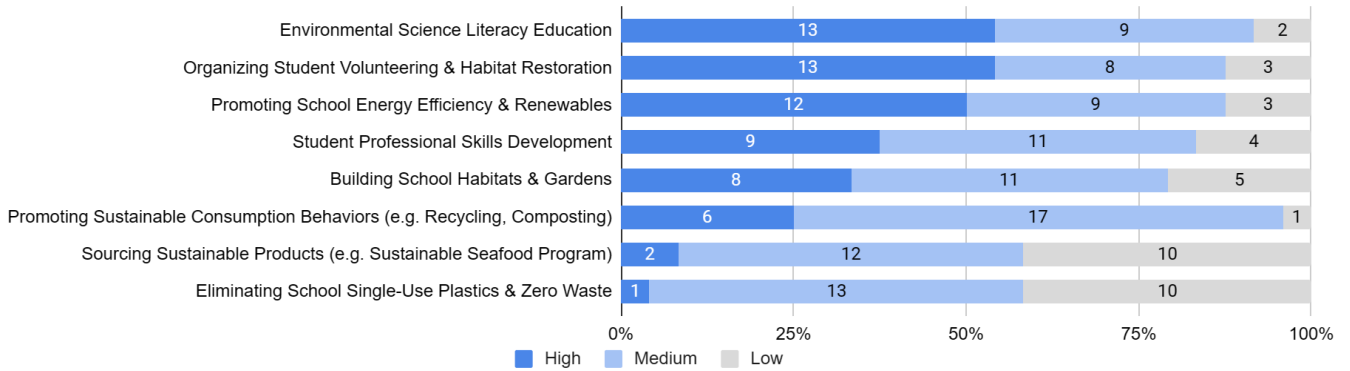


Figure 2. Key Success Factors When Delivering School Sustainability Programs

How important are the following factors for determining success of your school's sustainability program efforts?

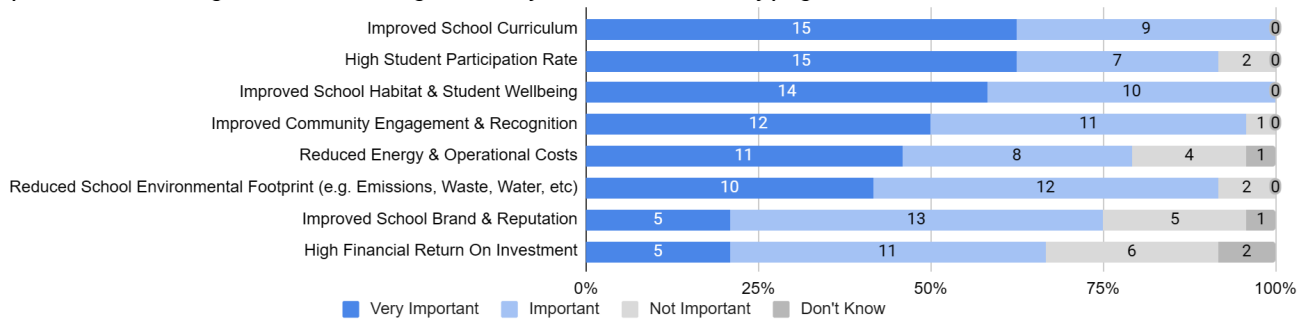
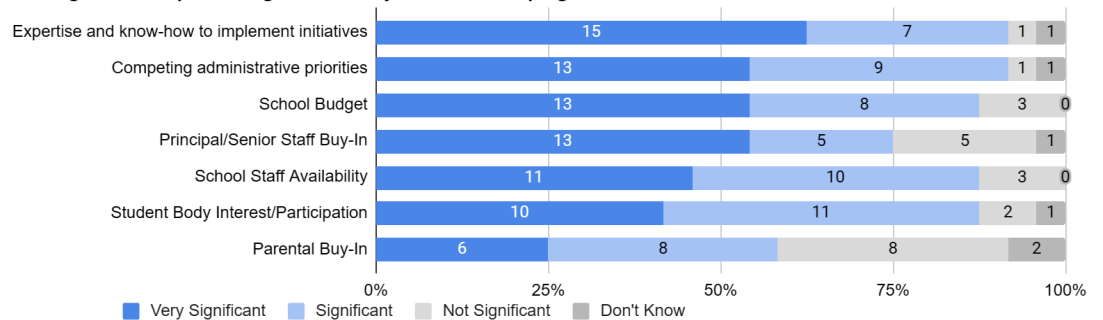


Figure 3. Most Significant Challenges When Delivering School Sustainability Programs

What are your most significant challenges when implementing sustainability-related school program initiatives?



Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Figure 4. Key Participants When Delivering School Sustainability Initiatives

Who of the following are involved in leading, planning or managing sustainability initiatives at your school? (Please select all that apply)

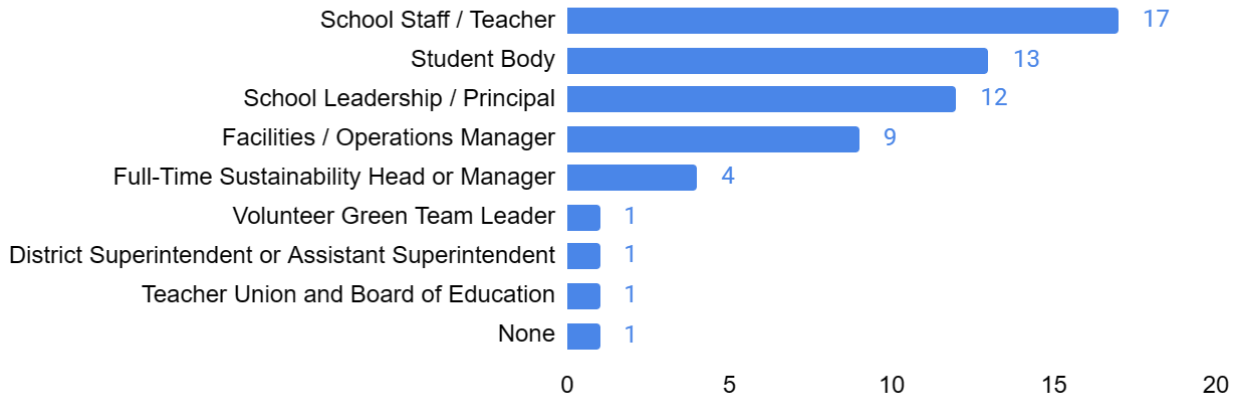


Figure 5. Key Decision-Makers When Selecting Third-Party Sustainability Consultants

Which of the following are key decision-makers for selecting/evaluating a sustainability consulting or services provider? (Please select all that apply)

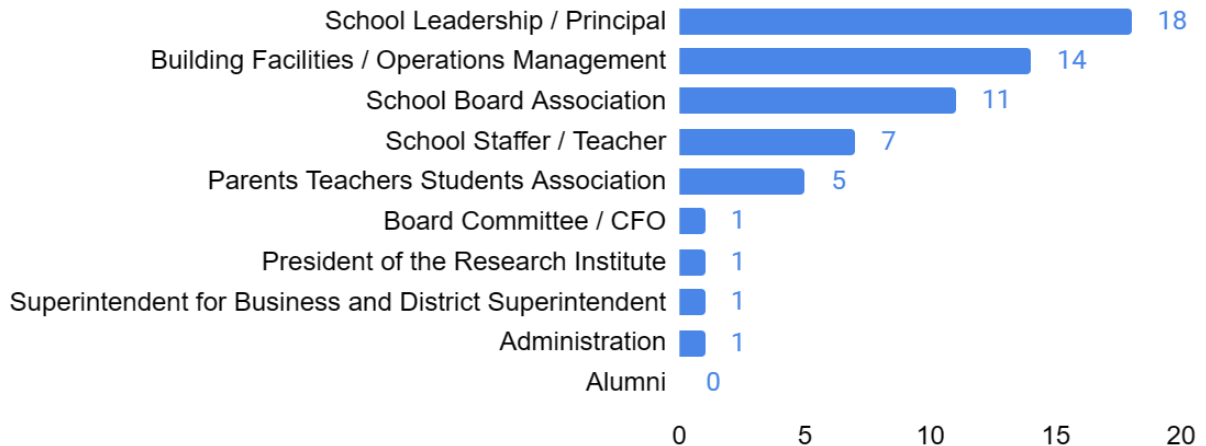
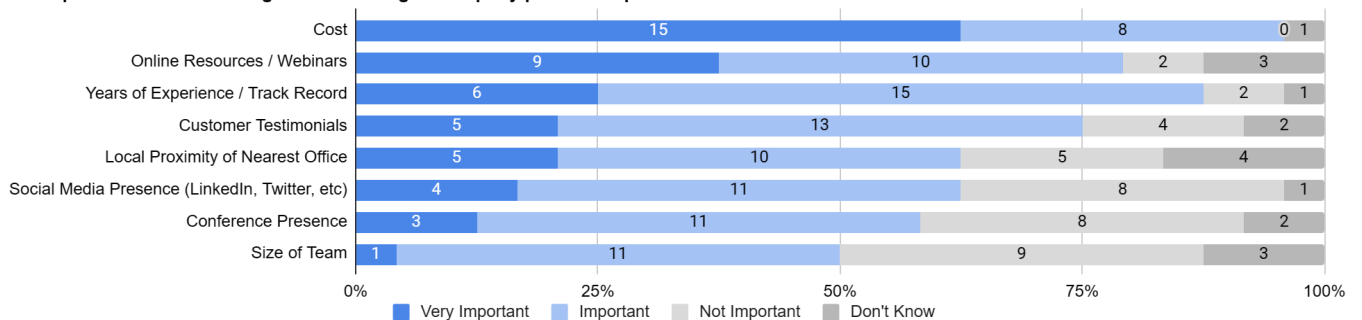


Figure 6. Top Evaluation Criteria When Selecting Third-Party Sustainability Consultants

How important are the following when choosing a third-party provider to partner with?



Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Figure 7. Most Common Funding Sources Used For School Sustainability Programs

Which of the following funding sources have you partnered with for grant funding over the last three years? (Please select all that apply)

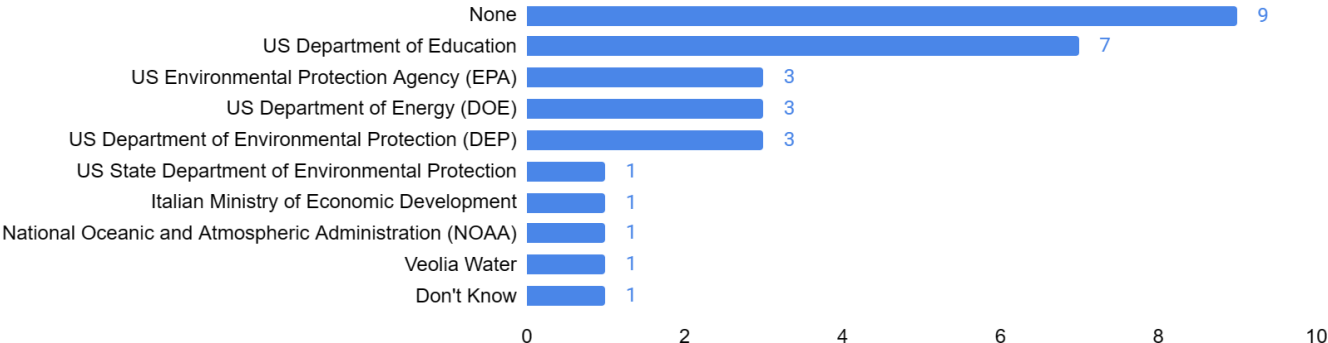
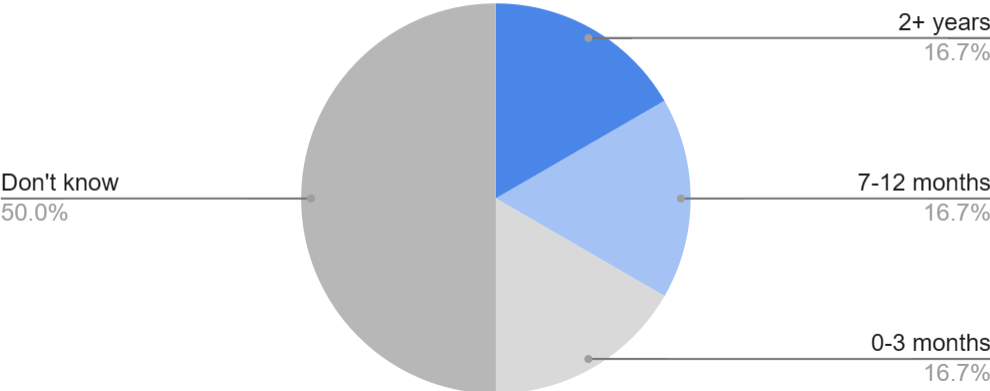


Figure 8. Lengths Of Engagements With Third-Party Sustainability Consulting Providers

If yes, how long have you been working with this consulting/services provider, or how long do you intend to work with them? (Please select one)



Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

Figure 9. Costs Of Engaging With Third-Party Sustainability Consulting Providers

If yes, how much does the current consulting/services provider cost on a per annum basis? (Please select one)

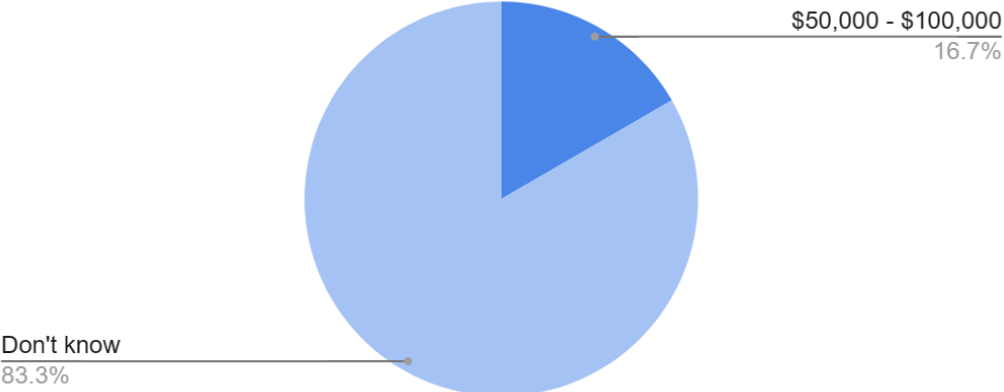
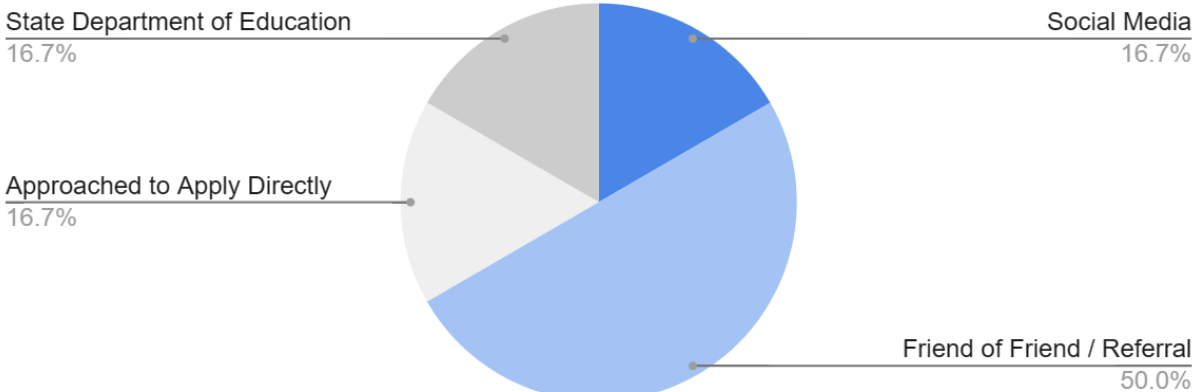


Figure 10. Most Common Inbound Sources For Consulting Provider Customer Acquisition

If yes, how did you first learn of this consulting/services provider? (Please select one)



Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

ITEM 4: Contact List

#	Job Title	Persona	School Type	Contact Type
1	Educator	Faculty	Public School	Survey
2	Teacher	Faculty	Public School, CTE	Survey
3	Science Teacher	Faculty	Charter, Public School	Survey
4	Energy Consultant	Former Teacher	Independent	Phone
5	Owner / Marketing	Alumnus, Donor	Independent	Video Interview
6	Senior Policy Advisor	2019 National Teacher of the Year	Public School	Video Interview
7	JROTC Director	Educational Director	Public School	Phone
8	Alumni Relations	Faculty	Independent	Video Interview
9	Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
10	School Sustainability Coordinator	Faculty	Public School	Engaged With
11	Principal	Faculty	Public School	Phone Call
12	Curriculum Director	Administration	Charter School	Video Interview
13	Principal	Administration	Public (well-funded)	Engaged With
14	Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
15	Associate Dean	Faculty	Higher Education	Video Interview
16	Faculty Member	Faculty	Higher Education	Video Interview
17	Student	Student	Higher Education	Survey
18	Director of the Upper School	Administration	Private School	Engaged With
19	High School Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
20	Chief Integration Officer	Faculty	Private School	Engaged With
21	High School Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
22	Outdoor Learning	Faculty	Public School	Video Interview

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

	Specialist			
23	CTAE Director	Faculty	Public School	Email
24	PTA Sustainability Chair	PTA	Public School	Engaged With
25	Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
26	Business Owner	Alumnus, Donor	Independent	Video Interview
27	Chair-Elect of the Faculty Senate	Faculty	Higher Education	Survey
28	HS Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
29	Founder	Faculty	Higher Education	Survey
30	School Board Council Member	Faculty	Higher Education	Video Interview
31	Principal	Faculty	Alternative School	Engaged With
32	Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
33	Student	Past Seaside Intern	N/A	Phone Call
34	PhD Associate professor	Faculty	Higher Education	Survey
35	Principal	Faculty	Catholic School	Video Interview
36	Head of Innovation	Faculty	Independent	Video Interview
37	Head of School	Head of School	Independent	Video Interview
38	Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
39	Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
40	Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
41	Director of the Office of Professional Standards	Faculty	Public School	Phone
42	Researcher	Faculty	National Research Institute	Survey
43	Executive Sous Chef	Faculty	Higher Education	In Person
44	Science Teacher	Faculty	Public School	Survey
45	Adjunct Professor	Faculty	Public School, Higher Education	Survey

ITEM 5: Grants Summary

The team identified 59 grants and provided a Grants Database to Seaside. Below is a breakdown of the grants identified.

- 12 Federal Grants
 - 2 Grants from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
 - 4 Grants from the Department of Education
 - 4 Grants from the Department of Energy (DOE)
 - 2 Grants from Science Bureaus
- 36 Private Grants
 - 32 Grants from Foundations
 - 4 Grants from Innovation Challenges
- 24 Regional Grants (Northeastern United States)
 - 5 State Departments of Environmental Protection
 - 19 Community-focused Nonprofits and Private Organizations

ITEM 6: Marketing Communication Sample

An example for an external client communication research can be the following:

1. When emailing with a potential customer for the first time, always aim to include the slide deck proactively as an attachment.
 - a. If you meet a potential customer in real life, share with them a copy of the deck to give them a more holistic review.
2. When scheduling the first formal meeting, send a rough itinerary that outlines the plan for the call.
 - a. This plan should include reviewing Seaside's consulting capabilities and using the deck, either throughout the discussion or as support material when needed.
 - b. Seaside should also have a short set of questions they try to have the customer verbally answer during the call (or in an email beforehand) to get a better understanding of the customer's needs. This can also be included in the body of the email, or in an attachment, to maintain meeting management.
 - c. The above two examples should leave Seaside and the potential customer with a better understanding of how they can potentially work together.
3. Following the first call, Seaside should follow up immediately with a thank you note that includes potential next steps and ways the two institutions can work together.
 - a. It is key for Seaside to try to keep the relationship momentum going. Providing clear next steps in written format will also help keep both parties informed, and will keep the relationship-building process organized.

Eventually, Seaside should aim to implement a similar strategy at each step of the consulting onboarding process when it has a larger customer base and is able to discern more identifiable, critical points.

ITEM 7: Steps to Elevating External Branding for Increased Client Acquisition

First impressions are very important. A potential customer could spend time on an organization's social media, website, searching for the organization on the web, or spend no additional time besides what they heard from a friend's referral in their network. A study done by the Missouri University of Science and Technology indicated that it takes 2.6 seconds for eyes to settle on key areas of a web page.²² British researchers who analyzed the trust and mistrust of online health sites also found that first impressions are 94% design related, versus content related.²³ In another experiment conducted to study the effects of product expectations on subjective usability ratings, findings revealed that a positive first impression (i.e., positive review) increases overall product satisfaction.²⁴ In short, first impressions are everything.

Thus, it is important for Seaside to have standardized, consolidated materials that explicitly share what services the company can provide, preferably in more detail than the website explanation. This explicit description will allow potential customers to discern fit and allow Seaside to hone in on which consulting offerings it can provide. The Capstone has outlined the following marketing deliverables that can be used in initial conversations and shared amongst potential customers.

- Promotional Writing Copy
 - Seaside's consulting Mission Statement: This should be one sentence that briefly describes what the consulting arm does. This can be put on the website, deck, one-pager, and in employee signatures. An example will be provided in the marketing deliverable.
 - Paragraph Overview: This short blurb outlines Seaside's consulting capabilities in significant detail. This should include consulting vertices, desired customers, and potential deliverables. This copy should be used in the body of emails and can be sent along with the deck. Snippets can be used in social media and branding materials.
- Pitch Deck
 - Decks are a common medium used by consulting services to showcase their offerings and expertise. These materials will help generate customer leads, as customers can share the digestible materials with their peers. On an internal basis, the materials will also help Seaside determine what areas are more interesting to their customer base. From this, the company can then adjust its offering to be more appealing to its desired customers.
 - An outline of a potential deck is included in the marketing deliverables.
- Promotional Video
 - These marketing materials can be shared on social media to provide a more detailed, visual overview of Seaside's offerings. An example video and script is included in the marketing deliverables.

ITEM 8: Video Marketing

Seaside can employ the following step-by-step strategy to effectively market this promotional video:

- Video Optimization
 - Begin by optimizing the video for each platform. Instagram Reels and TikTok videos can run up to 60 seconds, while YouTube Shorts allow for a maximum of 15 seconds. Tailor the content to fit within these time frames without losing the core message.
- Website Integration
 - Embed the video on the homepage of the Seaside website. Ensure that it is placed prominently for maximum visibility, perhaps in the “About Us” or “Our Mission” sections, to immediately engage visitors.
- Instagram Reels
 - Publish the video as an Instagram Reel. Make use of relevant hashtags to enhance discoverability and write a compelling caption to engage followers. Schedule the post for when most of Seaside’s followers are online to boost visibility.
- YouTube Shorts
 - Upload the video as a YouTube Short. Optimize the title, description, and tags for searchability, and add it to Seaside’s channel's Shorts shelf to increase its prominence.
- TikTok Reels
 - Share the video on TikTok, employing trending hashtags and a catchy description. Consider timing the release of the video with peak user activity times for maximum reach.
- Partner with Influencers
 - Identify influencers who align with Seaside's mission. Reach out to them with a collaboration proposal, asking them to share the video on their platforms. This can significantly amplify the reach and influence of Seaside’s message.
- Regular Updates
 - Regularly share updates, behind-the-scenes glimpses, and progress reports related to the video's theme on all platforms. This keeps followers engaged and encourages them to share the content within their networks.
- Monitor and Engage
 - Keep a close eye on the performance of Seaside’s video across all platforms. Respond to comments, engage with viewers, and use feedback to refine future content.

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

- Promotion
 - Consider paid promotions to expand the reach of Seaside's video. Sponsored posts on Instagram, YouTube ads, or promoted TikTok posts can reach a wider audience.
- Analyze and Refine
 - Lastly, continuously analyze the performance of the video. Use insights from these analytics to refine Seaside's strategy, identify what works best, and continually optimize Seaside's future content for better engagement.

ITEM 9: Pitch Deck

- Link: <https://rb.gy/ynw5a>

ITEM 10: Promotional Video

- Link: <https://share.synthesia.io/3454ca35-1d67-4852-bd74-9a274fd6054d>
- How to use Synthesia.io Platform: https://youtu.be/7cbfpy_W_ZI

ITEM 11: U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon Award Selection Criteria

The Three Pillars of the Award

It is important to note that, to be selected for the federal award, states' ED-GRS nominees must show progress in ALL the following areas, not merely some. These are minimum requirements for the federal award. Different states may have more specific requirements in any of the following areas.

1. Reduced Environmental Impact and Costs
 - Reduced or eliminated greenhouse gas emissions, using an energy audit or emissions inventory and reduction plan, cost-effective energy efficiency improvements, conservation measures, and/or on-site renewable energy and/or purchase of green power;
 - Improved water quality, efficiency, and conservation;
 - Reduced solid and hazardous waste production through increased recycling, reduced consumption, and improved management, reduction, or elimination of hazardous waste; and
 - Expanded use of alternative transportation, through active promotion of locally-available, energy-efficient and renewable energy options and implementation of alternative transportation supportive projects and policies.
2. Improved Health and Wellness

Seaside Sustainability Strategic Consulting Plan

- High standards of [Whole School Whole Community, Whole Child health](#), including health, nutrition, and outdoor physical education; health, counseling, and psychological services for both students and staff; family community involvement; and
 - An [integrated school environmental health program](#) that considers occupant health and safety in all design, construction, renovation, operations, and maintenance of facilities and grounds.
3. Effective Environmental and Sustainability Education
- Interdisciplinary learning about the key relationships between dynamic environmental, energy, and human systems;
 - Use of the environment and sustainability to develop STEM content knowledge and thinking skills to prepare graduates for the 21st century technology-driven economy; and
 - Development of civic engagement knowledge and skills and students' application of such knowledge and skills to address sustainability and environmental issues in their community.