



URBAN GREEN LAB™

LIVING SUSTAINABLY TOGETHER

2030 Strategic Plan

Lelani
(Lee)

Welcome from the Executive Director

My hometown of Nashville is at a crossroads, and together we have an extraordinary opportunity to shape the city's future.

Living Sustainably Together: Urban Green Lab's 2030 Strategic Plan charts a bold and hopeful course to make sustainability learning in Nashville a top priority, and a model for peer cities around the country. Rooted in the voices of our neighbors, partners, and leaders, and aligned with Nashville's climate, resilience, and zero waste goals, this plan serves not only as a guide for our work but also as a shared playbook for weaving sustainability learning into everyday life in our classrooms, households, and workplaces.

We listened carefully to opportunities raised by our community over the next five years – car dependence, waste, inequities, climate risks, etc. – and designed clear, ambitious goals, from shifting daily habits and transforming institutions to informing policy. Education is the engine that makes this possible, proving that small changes, when multiplied, create lasting impact. And if we're going to meet the city's big goals – like cutting emissions 80% by the year 2050 – it's going to take community education in all the places where we learn, work, and live.

Our plan was created during extraordinary challenges. Political and economic headwinds forced staff downsizing and financial restructuring, while a federal retreat from environmental priorities tested our mission. Yet we stayed true to our values, strengthened partnerships, and deepened our commitment.

This is Nashville's blueprint for sustainability education and it belongs to all of us.



Todd Lawrence





Photo by Drew Hays

A photograph of two men in business suits shaking hands. The man on the left is smiling and wearing glasses and a beard. The man on the right is seen from the back, also wearing glasses. In the background, other people are visible, including a woman looking towards the camera. The scene is indoors with warm lighting.

Our Mission

**We teach
communities
how to live
sustainably.**

Our Vision

A city where all Nashvillians are living more sustainably because they're learning how to do it in their daily lives – where they learn, work, and live.

Our Theory of Change

Urban Green Lab believes education sparks transformative action and that a little change goes a long way. When Nashvillians in classrooms, households, and workplaces make sustainable living a priority, it has a ripple effect community-wide.

Our Strategies

- 1 Educate & Train**
We deliver practical trainings across classrooms, households, and workplaces that build sustainable habits and track measurable outcomes.
- 2 Share Best Practices**
We recognize and showcase individuals, organizations, and leaders on their sustainability journey, creating models that inspire cultural change.
- 3 Act Collectively**
We convene cross-sector partners to align strategies, share knowledge, and build equity-centered, coordinated sustainability solutions.
- 4 Inform Policy**
We translate nonpartisan policy expertise in community learning through coalitions and forums that inform equitable decision-making citywide.

Our Values

At Urban Green Lab, we believe sustainability is for all of us – a human right that belongs to every person, regardless of race, place, or identity. Living more sustainably is a journey rooted in compassion, inclusion, and justice, made possible through education, collaboration, and stewardship. We see education as the spark for meaningful action, empowering people to make simple, joyful changes that add up to lasting impact. By working in partnership, we go further together, fostering creativity, accountability, and harmony. And as careful stewards, we commit to using resources responsibly and transparently to achieve our shared sustainability goals.

How We Created This Plan

In 2024, Urban Green Lab launched the development of its next long-term strategic plan aimed at the year 2030. Through a public Request for Proposals, Elevate Consulting was hired to facilitate the process over 2024–2025 with the engagement of staff, board, and community partners. Elevate guided the effort through data collection, interviews, surveys, and workshops that grounded the plan in Nashville’s sustainability priorities and UGL’s organizational capacity. The process drew on the following resources:

Stakeholder & Organizational Analysis

- **Stakeholder Landscape Scan** – facilitated by Elevate, with in-depth one-on-one interviews and survey responses.
- **Nashville SWOT** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats) – identified the city’s greatest assets (cultural capital, strong anchor institutions, community momentum) alongside urgent challenges (car dependence, waste diversion gaps, climate inequities).
- **Urban Green Lab SWOT** – examined UGL’s own strengths and constraints in finance, governance, staffing, and organizational capacity.

City, State, & Regional Plan Alignment

- [Climate Action Plan](#)
- [Zero Waste Master Plan](#)
- [2022 Greenhouse Gas Inventory](#)
- [TDOH 2025 State Health Plan](#)
- [Choose How You Move](#)
- [Healthy People 2030](#)
- [Imagine Nashville](#)
- [NashvilleNext](#)
- [Plan to Play](#)
- [Climate Adaptation & Resilience Plan](#)
- [GNRC Priority Climate Action Plan](#)
- [2023-2025 Nashville Community Health Improvement Plan \(CHIP\)](#)
- [TDEC 2015-2025 Solid Waste and Materials Management Plan](#)
- [Metropolitan Nashville-Davidson County Multi-Hazard Mitigation Plan](#)

Together, these inputs informed the 2030 goals, strategies, and metrics that position sustainability learning as the engine of change and as Nashville’s blueprint for climate action, equity, and resilience.





Advancing the SDGs

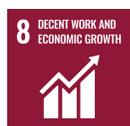
Urban Green Lab's work connects Nashville to the global movement for a more sustainable, equitable future. The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a shared blueprint for addressing the world's most urgent challenges by 2030. Our programs directly contribute to many of these goals, including:



Good Health and Well-Being (SDG 3): Promoting active lifestyles, clean air, nutritious food, and reduced exposure to pollution.



Quality Education (SDG 4): Training teachers, students, and professionals in sustainability through STEAM, SEL, and project-based learning.



Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8): Preparing students for green careers and helping organizations save costs through resource efficiency.



Reduced Inequalities (SDG 10): Centering equity, ensuring sustainability education reaches all communities, and amplifying underrepresented voices.



Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG 11): Supporting neighborhoods with tools to reduce waste, conserve water, and strengthen climate resilience.



Responsible Consumption and Production (SDG 12): Helping households, schools, and workplaces waste less and use resources wisely.



Climate Action (SDG 13): Reducing greenhouse gas emissions and advancing Nashville's climate goals through education and collaboration.



Partnerships for the Goals (SDG 17): Building diverse coalitions with nonprofits, businesses, schools, and government to accelerate change.

By aligning Nashville's local actions with the UN SDGs, Urban Green Lab demonstrates how sustainability education benefits not only our city but also the global community.

Priority Issues for 2030

Urban Green Lab's 2030 Strategic Plan focuses on the following five priority issues where sustainability education can make the greatest impact over the next five years. These were chosen through a review of Nashville's sustainability and health plans, regional climate strategies, stakeholder interviews, and Urban Green Lab's SWOT analyses. While issues like energy and water conservation are important too, they are already deeply woven into each of these priorities which reflect the city's more urgent challenges, the opportunities for measurable change, and where education and collaboration are most needed now.

- 1 Waste Reduction**

Nashville generates nearly twice the national waste average. UGL teaches reduction strategies and spotlights best practices, cutting methane emissions and supporting Metro's Solid Waste Master Plan.
- 2 Sustainable Transportation**

Transportation produces 53% of Nashville's emissions. Education, partnerships, and behavior change make transit, biking, walking, and carpooling practical, supporting city goals for carbon reduction and equity.
- 3 Extreme Heat & Weather Adaptation**

Nashville's extreme heat days may double by mid-century. Education equips families, schools, and workplaces with low-cost strategies like shade and stormwater management, protecting health and advancing resilience.
- 4 Equity & Underserved Communities**

Vulnerable neighborhoods face disproportionate flooding, heat, and pollution. Education must prioritize equity, elevating lived experiences and ensuring resilience tools reach all of us, supporting equity in citywide climate plans.
- 5 Health & Climate**

Climate change worsens respiratory, cardiovascular, and mental health risks. Sustainability education connects daily choices to disease prevention, aligning with local health plans and ensuring community resilience.

FOOD IS ENERGY
WASTELESS

**LEARN HOW TO
REDUCE YOUR
FOOD WASTE AT:
URBANGREENLAB.ORG/MIRALIS**

Goal 1: Engage Communities Equitably

Why

Underserved communities bear the brunt of climate impacts yet have the least access to sustainability and adaptation education.

Top Actions

- Co-create programs with frontline partners to ensure relevance and ownership.
- Design programs so organizations share learning widely across their constituencies.
- Recruit and train champions, advisors, board, and staff reflective of Nashville's diversity.

Vision

A Nashville where every resident, regardless of race, income, or neighborhood, has access to sustainability learning and the tools to thrive in a changing climate.

2030 Target

Deliver sustainability education each year to residents in at least 80% of Nashville zip codes, ensuring equitable access citywide.



Alignment

Reinforces the Climate Adaptation & Resilience Plan, NashvilleNext equity principles, and Imagine Nashville's focus on inclusive opportunity.

2030 PROGRAM GOALS

Goal 2: Transform Systems & Institutions

Why

Lasting change requires embedding sustainability learning into community institutions (including government), not just individual behavior.

Top Actions

- Work with school systems to align with standards and train cohorts of educators.
- Prepare sustainability leaders within organizations to guide and plan learning.
- Integrate sustainability into existing systems like new-hire orientation and staff trainings.

Vision

Classrooms, workplaces, and government agencies embed sustainability into policies, practices, and culture, making sustainable living a civic norm.

2030 Target

Embed sustainability learning into 75% of Nashville schools, 200 workplaces, and 5 government agencies.



Alignment

Advances the Zero Waste Master Plan (institutional diversion), Metro Schools sustainability goals, and the GNRC Priority Climate Action Plan.

Goal 3: Change Daily Habits at Scale

Why

Daily habits drive long-term change, but Nashvillians face barriers like car dependence, waste challenges, and limited awareness.

Top Actions

- Expand trainings and initiatives with clear, simple calls to action.
- Provide year-round follow-up with fresh strategies for living and working sustainably.
- Integrate behavior-change tracking into every program.

Vision

A city where everyday choices add up to lasting change, creating a culture of sustainable living.

2030 Target

At least 75% of program participants adopt measurable sustainable practices related to our priority issues.



Alignment

Supports Metro’s Climate Action Plan, Zero Waste Master Plan, and Imagine Nashville goals for cultural and behavior shifts.

Goal 4: Inform Policy & Civic Leadership

Why

Policy change requires credible, nonpartisan voices to connect community learning with decision-makers.

Top Actions

- Develop a clear policy agenda to guide action and empower community advocacy.
- Provide nonpartisan trainings, forums, and policy briefs for Metro and state leaders.
- Establish a caucus of government leaders prioritizing sustainability.

Vision

A trusted network of leaders, educators, and community voices informs policies that advance sustainability, equity, and resilience for all Nashvillians.

2030 Target

Shape at least 3 local or regional policy initiatives through our trusted, nonpartisan expertise.



Alignment

Connects directly to the Climate Action & Resilience Plan, Choose How You Move, and the GNRC Priority Climate Action Plan.

Goal 5: Deliver Community-Wide Impact

Why

Sustainability education is often overlooked, yet it plays a vital role in strengthening broader environment, health, education, economy, and equity impact.

Top Actions

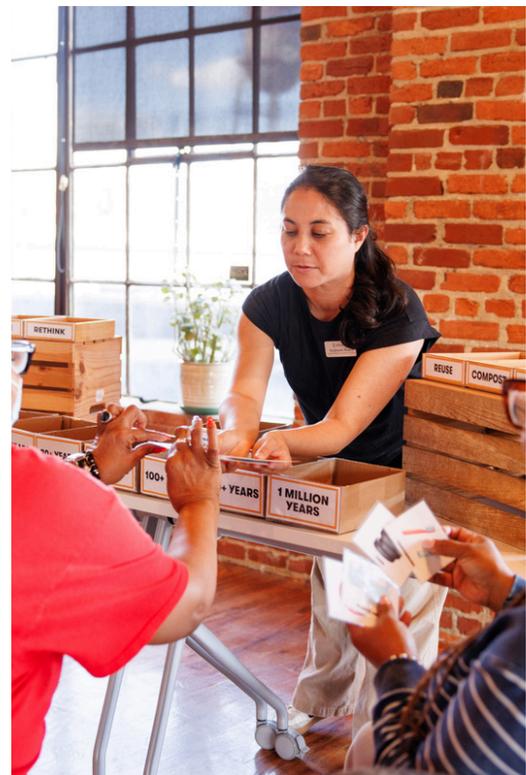
- Position sustainability education as a tool for advancing Nashville’s greater well-being goals.
- Partner with Metro and others to connect daily learning to larger systems and priorities.
- Communicate and celebrate sustainability’s broader benefits so leaders and residents value its role in resilience and prosperity.

Vision

A Nashville where sustainability education is recognized as a vital contributor to community-wide resilience, prosperity, and quality of life.

2030 Target

Show how sustainability education supports Nashville’s environment, health, education, economy, and equity, ensuring UGL’s work is valued citywide.



Alignment

Supports Nashville’s key plans for zero waste, climate resilience, health improvement, education success, and economic resilience, as well as national benchmarks like Healthy People 2030 and the GNRC Priority Climate Action Plan.



Tracking Our Progress

Urban Green Lab tracks progress at every stage of our work. We measure reach and access through registration data, readiness through post-event surveys, and sustained actions through quarterly follow-ups. By connecting short-term outputs with long-term outcomes and community impact, we ensure that sustainability education delivers results.

		2025 Baseline		2030 Goal
Program Reach	Zip Codes Represented	49%		80%
	Organizations Served	499		675
	Educators Trained	383		585

Numbers are cumulative estimates since 2018 only. Zip codes are standard or unique codes for Davidson County only.

Participant Outcomes	Making more sustainable daily choices at work or home	80%		90%
	Using new resources to work or live more sustainably	50%		75%
	Integrating sustainability into work learning, culture, or operations	50%		80%
	Connecting with like-minded people in my workplace or community	80%		95%
	Advocating for policies that prioritize sustainable living	10%		40%

All former program participants will be surveyed quarterly to know if, because of their most-recent engagement with Urban Green Lab, they will continue or begin these activities.

Observing Long-Term Community Impact

Urban Green Lab observes how its mission may indirectly support long-term community well-being in key areas, using Metro and partner benchmarks.

Environment

We follow indicators such as waste diversion rates, greenhouse gas emissions, tree canopy coverage, water quality, and energy use. Tracking these trends shows how education translates into reduced environmental impact, stronger climate resilience, and healthier ecosystems across Nashville's neighborhoods.

Health

We follow respiratory health outcomes (asthma prevalence, air-quality-related ER visits), cardiovascular health (heart disease, hypertension), and mental health and wellbeing (stress, social connectedness). These indicators reveal how sustainability practices like clean air, active transportation, and healthy food access can support healthier, longer lives.

Growth

Indicators include green job growth, workforce readiness, cost savings from waste and energy efficiency, and investment in sustainable infrastructure. Observing economic benefits can demonstrate how sustainability education supports a thriving, competitive Nashville where businesses, workers, and households prosper through innovation and efficiency.

Education

We follow student engagement with STEAM subjects, social-emotional learning benchmarks, and participation in project-based sustainability activities. These measures highlight how sustainability education builds critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving skills that prepare young people for careers and civic leadership.

Equity

We follow indicators on environmental justice and disparities in housing, transportation, food access, climate resilience, and health outcomes. Measuring these gaps helps ensure sustainability education reduces barriers, lifts underrepresented voices, and advances fairness so all Nashvillians can thrive in a sustainable city.

URBAN GREEN LAB
2030 STRATEGIC PLAN



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SUSTAINABLY**