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presented by **Virginia Mason Medical Center**

Leverage Your Data: Tools to Build Your Sustainability Strategy

Whether you are a public organization, academic institution or private company, you are charged with not only managing your sustainability data but putting it to meaningful use. There are a variety of tools to help you get your house in order - improve your operations, carbon accounting, etc. But do the tools you've picked align with your sustainability strategy to put you on a holistically improved path? Learn about the tools different organizations have utilized to leverage their data management and set them apart as leaders.

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Why consider enhanced software and systems for data management?
- Imagine: data can be fun, easy, and engaging!
- Spreadsheets are often erroneous, hard to keep current, and not self-generating
- Success stories start with data – showcasing success is a top priority, the need for solid and accessible data is considerable
- Consider it a marketing strategy for proving your program's success – do what you can to leverage the data to showcase program benefits
- Spreadsheets are free; time, data management, marketing & communications, reporting, project tracking, data consolidation, etc., are not.

Questions to ask before investing in enhanced or enterprise data management software
- How complex are my operations? How many emissions sources am I dealing with?
- Is our current system efficient and easy to use?
- What is the future for tracking this data? Will it become more or less relevant with the prospect of carbon accounting, increasing resource costs, organizational process improvement efforts, greater awareness of sustainability programs, etc.
- What is our vision for the best software that will work for us?
- What do we need an enhanced system to do that is different from what we're doing now?

Metrics of success
1. Time savings
2. Public engagement
3. Management engagement
4. Rapid response time to inquiries
5. More *conviction* in communications
6. General marketing and communications benefits
7. "Wow" effect (e.g. "Wow – that's a lot of money!")

Lessons Learned
- Data doesn't showcase itself – manpower must be dedicated to analysis and marketing of the data just the same, but hopefully less time will be going toward data management and more time toward data marketing with enhanced data management systems.
- Data doesn't change itself – projects must drive the data up or down. Establishing a great data management system will not make the numbers any better in and of itself.
- Spreadsheets still have a use – running specific calculations and slicing information in more ways keeps spreadsheets in use, but for long-term, big picture data management, they are inefficient and can be erroneous.

STARS Framework

STARS is an innovative, voluntary self-reporting framework for colleges and universities to gauge progress toward sustainability and be recognized for sustainability leadership. STARS is designed to:
- Provide a guide for advancing sustainability in all sectors of higher education, from education and research to operations and administration.
- Enable meaningful comparisons over time and across institutions by establishing a common standard of measurement for sustainability in higher education.
- Create incentives for continual improvement toward sustainability.
- Facilitate information sharing about higher education sustainability practices and performance.
- Build a stronger, more diverse campus sustainability community and promote a comprehensive understanding of sustainability that includes its social, economic and environmental dimensions.

What Businesses Can Learn From STARS

The University of Washington has utilized STARS reporting for enhancing existing sustainability efforts on campus and has incorporated areas of improvement into strategic planning and behavior change initiatives currently underway. Businesses can use the transparent framework from higher education to discover new ways of measuring their sustainability performance and similarly expand their current efforts. The STARS framework should be reviewed and indicators should be selected which match your business's mission and values. The complete list of indicators is publicly available on the STARS website: **http://stars.aashe.org**

Key Takeaways
- ✓ Make savings, projects, or other achievements VISIBLE! A picture is worth 1,000 words, and nobody has time to read 1,000 words, so a picture is often your only option (also translates into any language quickly).
- ✓ Translate savings (e.g. from gallons of fuel, reams of paper, etc) into dollars in order to tell the story of financial savings - first and foremost.
- ✓ Use consistent units of measure so the audience sees progress toward a consistent goal
- ✓ Consider metrics that are more understandable, like 'cars off the road,' instead of lbs of co2 reduced (which can add up to millions and be incomprehensible). Use online EPA calculators for consistency and ease.
- ✓ Show stakeholders that change is happening now – keep it timely, and hopefully recurring.

University of Washington
Environmental Stewardship & Sustainability

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