

# 13 Sustainability:

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### Building Successful Associations



In a recent survey\* conducted by Accenture for the United Nations, 93% of corporate CEOs interviewed said that sustainability is 'critical to their future success'.

Sustainability is a broad concept that includes governance, ethics and anticorruption, human rights, diversity, financial viability and many more issues that go far beyond the traditional concept of 'green'. When integrated in an organisation's strategy, sustainability delivers reduced costs and reduced employee turnover while delivering increases not only in market share but also in stakeholder trust in the brand.

#### Defining the Sustainable Association

A sustainable association is an organisation that generates growth, profitability and member value by integrating principles of sustainable development throughout the association.

**Profitability** - It is essential that all associations, although 'not-for-profit' organisations, generate surpluses which can be reinvested in initiatives, programmes and services designed to fulfil the organisation's mission as well as reinforce value and relevance to members.

**Growth** - A sustainable business model allows for viable long-term growth. This model must be based on social responsibility principles - good governance, staff empowerment, sustainability reporting and efficient management of resources - which will have the added advantage of cutting costs in the short term and changing behaviour to embrace sustainability.

**Member Value** - Associations can help their members to understand the business case and stay ahead of the trends through industry research. They can increase revenues and member value by providing innovative services and tools such as measurement and reporting systems.

#### Sustainability as a framework for success

Many organisational leaders recognise the importance of sustainability but do not understand how to integrate sustainable business principles into their organisations. However, good practice toolkits are available:

- The Framework for Strategic Sustainable Development (FSSD), also known as The Natural Step Framework ([www.thenaturalstep.org](http://www.thenaturalstep.org))
- The United Nations Global Compact ([www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)) - the world's largest sustainability initiative with over 7,000

organisations supporting its 10 universal principles. Their management approach developed with Deloitte is another good resource.

- The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) framework ([www.globalreporting.org](http://www.globalreporting.org)) A recent report produced by the GRI in partnership with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and KPMG found that 142 unique regulatory instruments addressed sustainability reporting in 30 countries with mandatory reporting already implemented in 16 nations including Spain, Norway, Denmark, the UK and South Africa.

One example of best practice is the International Council of Mining and Metals (ICMM), a London-based trade organisation of 18 major corporations and 30 mining and global commodity associations. ICMM worked with GRI staff to create the first standards specific to the mining and minerals sector.

Now, after a two-year transition period, all but one new member report at GRI levels. The industry can now see how public reporting is improving performance based on the stronger engagement of leaders with ICMM and their improved human rights and community relations programmes.

#### In conclusion

This is an exciting time for associations that embrace sustainability as a framework to address new challenges, not as barriers to success but as opportunities for innovation and growth, and to enhance member value. Association management teams must take the lead in guiding members towards sustainable practices by updating outdated processes and paradigms to more accurately reflect the dynamic business landscape in which they now operate.

\* *United Nations Global Compact Annual Review 2010* [www.unglobalcompact.org](http://www.unglobalcompact.org)

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