



THE LIVING STANDARD ACTION TOOLKIT

JULY 2019

USGBC's [Living Standard campaign](#) seeks to expand the conversation around sustainability and green buildings outside of the green building community to reach a broader population. The campaign aims to understand perspectives on climate risks from outside our community so we can reach the people who will be most affected before it's too late, and in doing so, help raise the standard of living for communities around the world. To support this effort, we will provide our community with the tools—statistics, stories, data and messaging—to help them engage the public to change their behavior or decisions on the scale necessary to accelerate efforts to combat climate-related risks.

Research suggests the green building community can tap into the public's desire for better local environments with the following approach:

- Connect people's concern to action by localizing the impact of climate-related risks and emphasizing the health impact on friends and family.
- Show how green buildings can play a bigger role in communities where people live.
- Embrace more inclusive messaging and language.

To make our Living Standard message and campaign something that can be repeated and amplified by our community, we present an “Action Toolkit.” The purpose of this Toolkit is to give our community—from LEED professionals and practitioners to USGBC members, from advocates to developers to teachers—tools for how to carry our message into the broader public.

This Toolkit presents six methods for community outreach:

1. **Framing the issue:** The why, what, and how of our challenge and the entry point into our community.
2. **“Say it fast” message box:** A concise way to communicate our principal message in 150 words or fewer.
3. **Key messages:** A sample script and sequence for our key messages. Outreach should begin with our first message and continue to run through the script as is appropriate to the audience.
4. **A call to action:** Tangible and accessible ways the public can join our efforts.
5. **Words that work:** A glossary of words our community should utilize to be more inclusive to a broader audience.
6. **Images that work:** A glossary of example images to visually communicate the human story we want to tell.

FRAMING THE ISSUE

The why, what, and how of our challenge and the entry point into our community

Main Thesis — The overwhelming majority of Americans agree environmental problems are important but people don't feel the urgent need to solve them because the problem feels too overwhelming, too abstract, and too distant from their realities. Our goal must be to turn intent into action. That means starting with baby steps for how we can live in a more environmentally sustainable way today and letting those conversations and actions lead to collective giant leaps in the long run.

The “What?” — Nearly everyone agrees environmental problems are important, but we aren't acting fast enough to solve them.

The “Why?” — People believe taking action on environmental problems is either inaccessible, unaffordable, or less urgent than other problems. Moreover, even if you take action, it is very difficult to feel the impact of the bigger problem.

The “How?” — We need to speak to more people outside of our community using inclusive language and powerful images to make everyone feel they have the ability to take action in their day-to-day to create a more sustainable environment.



“SAY IT FAST” MESSAGE BOX

A concise way to communicate our principal message in 150 words or fewer

Our families deserve to inherit a safe, healthy environment. However, more extreme weather events, fires, droughts, hurricanes, and an increasing exposure to contaminated water, polluted air, and increased toxins threaten our lives and our children's lives.

Where we live, work, and play should not hurt us, but protect and enrich our lives in a sustainable way. This should not be a luxury or a privilege, but a standard everyone can enjoy and expect.

Green buildings and green communities allow you to live more sustainably in ways you can tangibly experience—your health, the air you breathe, the water you drink. They offer a better quality of life for all, while also generating a lower global carbon footprint, reducing each family's electricity and water bills, and creating new green jobs.



KEY MESSAGES

A sample script and sequence for our key messages

Outreach should begin with our first message and continue to run through the script as appropriate to the audience...

FAMILIES MATTER — OUR CHILDREN DESERVE BETTER

- Whether you are a parent or grandparent, a teenager, or a son or daughter, everyone is concerned about the health of their friends and family. This is not just about high stakes for our planet, but about living healthier and longer lives.

*Insert your personal story, who you are passionate about protecting. **View an example here.***

- Our families, children, and future generations are already being harmed by environmental problems and climate-related threats—from air pollution to contaminated drinking water, to building materials that cause asthma or sickness. We all deserve better.
- Green buildings and communities improve human health. Studies show children living in green buildings have significantly lower rates of respiratory illnesses, like asthma, than those living in conventional buildings. And, a recent Harvard University study shows basic mental functions (thinking, sensing, feeling) **improve by 101 percent in green buildings compared to conventional buildings.**

ENVIRONMENTAL PROBLEMS ARE ALREADY NEGATIVELY IMPACTING YOUR COMMUNITY

- The discussion of the environment is very focused on the big numbers around the global consequences to our planet and the dire stakes we find ourselves in. These are true, but they don't tell the story of how the environment is hurting our health every day.
- From higher rates of asthma to dirtier drinking water, environmental problems are already hurting you and your family's health.

*Insert local climate-related weather events in your area. **View an example here.***

- Too few people think about the impact that where they spend their time has on their personal health and the environment. What we don't know can hurt us. We don't know if our homes' walls protect us from air pollution, toxins, smoke, and other unhealthy microbes. We don't know if our water pipes protect us from contaminated drinking water, toxins, and chemicals.
- Green buildings and sustainable communities give you confidence in the health of where you work and live. They use sustainable materials, make the air and water you consume cleaner, and they use less energy and produce less waste to do so.
- They also protect the environment by reducing the amount of harmful carbon, which speeds up extreme weather events and other natural disasters. According to the most recent IPCC report, a city's buildings account for **almost 40 percent of global carbon emissions**. A Department of Energy review of LEED-certified buildings managed by the General Services Administration saw **a 34 percent reduction of carbon**.

EVERYONE DESERVES ACCESS TO GREENER COMMUNITIES AND SUSTAINABLE LIVING

- Everyone deserves to live in a healthier, greener environment. Regardless of resources and your immediate needs, living a more sustainable life is getting easier and more accessible.
- Globally, there are more green buildings and communities than you might realize. There are nearly 98,000 registered and certified commercial buildings participating in LEED, totaling more than 21 billion square feet, across 175 countries and territories. More than 90 cities and communities have met green living standards and achieved certification under the LEED for Cities and LEED for Communities rating systems. And in the U.S., more than 400 municipalities, 32 states, and 14 federal agencies either mandate or also reference LEED as a best-practice for achieving sustainability goals.

Insert local examples of known green buildings, campuses, or cities, communities in your area.
[View an example here.](#)

- While LEED certification is the standard, you don't need to be in a LEED-certified building to make your home or place of work greener. The goal should be to make our buildings perform better tomorrow than they do today. Using toxin-free materials, clean energy, good air ventilation, and air-purifying plants in your home or workplace can improve your physical health by reducing symptoms of allergies and asthma.
- And, you can make these choices in a way that saves money. **The average LEED-certified building uses 32 percent less electricity** than conventional buildings; green buildings reduce individuals' utility bills by thousands of dollars yearly.

A CALL TO ACTION

Tangible and accessible ways the public can join our efforts

We all want better lives for ourselves, our families, and our children. We all can take part in making our communities healthier and more livable. Every little action—from recycling, to conserving water and electricity, to choosing to live and work in green buildings—helps everyone. These small steps spark a larger discussion about air ventilation, toxin-free building materials, or energy conservation. And, those larger discussions lead to the giant leaps where intention becomes action.

Every conversation we have inside or outside our community must leave others with concrete actions to take:

- 1. Talk about the issues.** Most people believe environmental problems are important but do not take action or make it a priority. Talk about the issues with family or friends. Talk about them with clients. Talk about it with your coworkers or supervisors. By talking about the issues in the context of our personal stories we make them more immediate and real.
- 2. Make the link between the high stakes and the local impacts.** What are the environment-related problems your community is dealing with—is it contaminated water, pollution, high energy costs, or extreme weather events like fires, droughts, hurricanes, or flooding? Gather this information and share it back to us for feedback at livingstandard@usgbc.org. Having a clear sense of how environmental issues are playing out in communities all across the country will make it easier to draw the connection between the existential stakes and people's every day.
- 3. Share your story at livingstandard.org.** People respond to human stories much more than facts and figures. As the people on the frontline of the USGBC community who have helped support this effort over the past 25 years, we need you to share your story to help show others how green buildings, green communities, and green living relate to them.
- 4. Incorporate more green living practices in your daily life.** We believe in green buildings and green communities and want everyone to incorporate that ethos into their every day. This can include recycling, turning off lights, conserving water, or bringing air-purifying plants into your home or work. Those small actions help you live a healthier life and also can save you money.

5. Access and share resources.

» Education

- USGBC's [benefits of green building](#). This is a short summary of the human, environmental, and economic benefits of a green building.
- USGBC's [policy library](#). This includes information on policies related to green building and LEED at the federal, state, and local levels.
- [USGBC+](#) (USGBC's member magazine), where you can search and find stories related to green buildings to use in speeches and outreach.
- The [Education @USGBC platform](#) has hundreds of hours of educational courses on green building and sustainability. Also visit [Learning Lab](#) to access hands-on sustainability curriculum and resources to help K-12 educators bring classroom projects to life.
- [USGBC directory](#) includes information on members and all certified and registered projects, which can be filtered down to your state and community. Our [state market briefs](#) also provide aggregated numbers and statistics for each state.

» Action

- Actions can be as simple as placing an air-purifying potted plant in your home. Back in 1989, [a NASA study](#) showed 15 houseplants remove as much as 87 percent of indoor air pollutants within 24 hours (1 potted plant per 100 sq ft of home or office space). Some of the plants which performed best include: Areca palm, Lady palm, Bamboo palm, Rubber plant, Dracaena, English ivy, Dwarf date palm, Ficus, Boston fern, and Peace lily.
- [List of Cradle to Cradle Certified products](#). The Cradle to Cradle program certifies products based on five quality categories—material health, material reutilization, renewable energy and carbon management, water stewardship, and social fairness.
- [Arc](#) is a technology platform to manage, measure, analyze, score and communicate real-world performance data for your building, portfolio, or school. By tracking your buildings' output and trends, you are empowered to enhance their sustainability performance, promote human health and well-being and contribute to a higher quality of life.
- The [TRUE Zero Waste certification system](#) enables any business, property manager, school, government agency, or non-profit, to achieve zero waste by diverting all solid waste from the landfill and incineration, cutting their carbon footprint and supporting public health.

WORDS THAT WORK

LESS INCLUSIVE WORDS	WORDS THAT WORK	WHY? ACCORDING TO THE RESEARCH
Climate change	“Climate-related risks or extreme weather events” and “climate emergency, crisis, or breakdown”	Climate change and global warming are political. Climate-related risks/extreme weather events, climate crisis, and global heating accurately describe real-life events taking place and are more active to convey the urgency and negative impacts, rather than just passive.
Global warming	Global heating	
Living green and green movement	Living sustainably and environmentalism	“Green” and “green movement” are associated with exclusivity and political tribes. Sustainable is an apolitical, non-zero sum behavior, while environmentalism is associated with nature above all else.
Carbon neutral	Low carbon footprint	Low is good; neutral lacks understanding.
LEED v4.1, LEED BD+C, LEED ID+C, etc.	LEED green building standards	Be explicit in human terms. Don't use jargon.
Built environment	Green building / green community	Be explicit in human terms. Don't use jargon.
<Images of political figures>	<Images of business, children, community>	Use inclusive, positive imagery. Avoid alienating figures and unnecessarily creating “tribes.”

IMAGES THAT WORK

DRAMATIC IMAGES SHOW PROOF TO PEOPLE THIS IS HAPPENING



DEMONSTRATE LOCAL, TANGIBLE IMPACTS



USE HUMANS



OVER STRUCTURES, REPORTS & PLAQUES

