



Strategy 2025

OUR OFFICIAL STRATEGY TOWARDS
SUSTAINABILITY

Green Office VU Amsterdam

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INTRODUCTION

VISION

By 2025, the Vrije Universiteit will hold a solid leading position as the most sustainable University in The Netherlands and the Green Office VU will play a pivotal role as its main sustainability platform and think tank, achieving a permanent advisory role in all sustainability-related decisions as the voice of the VU Community.

MISSION

The mission of the Green Office VU is to make a substantial and sustainable impact by influencing and working together with the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, its community and partners.

CENTRAL STRATEGIC GOALS FOR GO VU 2025



our People

The Green Office VU is a model of sustainability that encourages employees and students to practice sustainable citizenship



our Campus

The Green Office VU is one of the sustainable avenues in which the transformation to sustainability can thrive within the university



our Society

The Green Office VU is a leader and accelerator in transformation to sustainability beyond the university grounds

GO SUCCESS PRINCIPLES

- Impact - The GO Core Team will focus on few impactful projects while delegating some faculty-level projects to the Green Ambassadors.
- Efficiency - In the context of the Green Office, we define efficiency as the approach that optimises the use of our resources to produce the maximum possible impact.
- Accountability - our obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for our actions is a key principle that the Green Office should practice.

SUSTAINABILITY DEFINITION

Sustainability is broadly defined as the approach that fulfills the economic, social and environmental needs of the current and future generations within the means of our planet.¹ Our strategy operates within the framework of the Paris Climate Agreement, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and The Amsterdam City Climate Neutral Plan², including the Doughnut Commitment³. More specifically, we will focus on goals that are within our areas of expertise and that we believe are essential for creating and maintaining a sustainable VU. This is a fresh start for a prominent and robust **Green Office VU**.⁴

¹ United Nations General Assembly, 1987, p. 43

² <https://www.amsterdam.nl/bestuur-organisatie/volg-beleid/ambities/gezonde-duurzame-stad/klimaatneutraal/#hb7ee6eeb-c7e0-4c7c-bd54-123eb4e5ed39> visited on 20/04/2020

³ <https://publish.circle-economy.com/amsterdam-city-doughnut> visited on 20/04/2020

⁴ VU Strategy 2020, Action Plan 7.3: "Green Office VU will play an increasingly robust and prominent role. People will experience the campus as a truly green and sustainable place."

STRUCTURE & ORGANISATION

To further understand the way we work, our organisation’s structure is presented below. Figure 1 provides an overview of the portfolios and internal structure of the GO VU.

Our structure consists of 5 portfolios namely: Research, Education, Campus Operations, Outreach, and Community. Each of these has an officer who oversees the portfolio and is responsible for the implementation and success of the projects undertaken. These portfolios also have their own team under them consisting of volunteers and students from the different faculties that are eager to work on sustainability. We expound more on the activities and roles that these portfolios take in the next sections of this document.

The management of the team and overall strategy is governed by the manager who plays both the administrative and leadership roles within the organisation. He/she initiates action to strengthen the results of each officer and their respective portfolios. He/she is guided by a staff coordinator from the Amsterdam Sustainability Institute who acts as an indirect supervisor and mainly mentors the manager. The manager also receives advice on internal and external issues from the Advisory Board consisting of officers from previous years.

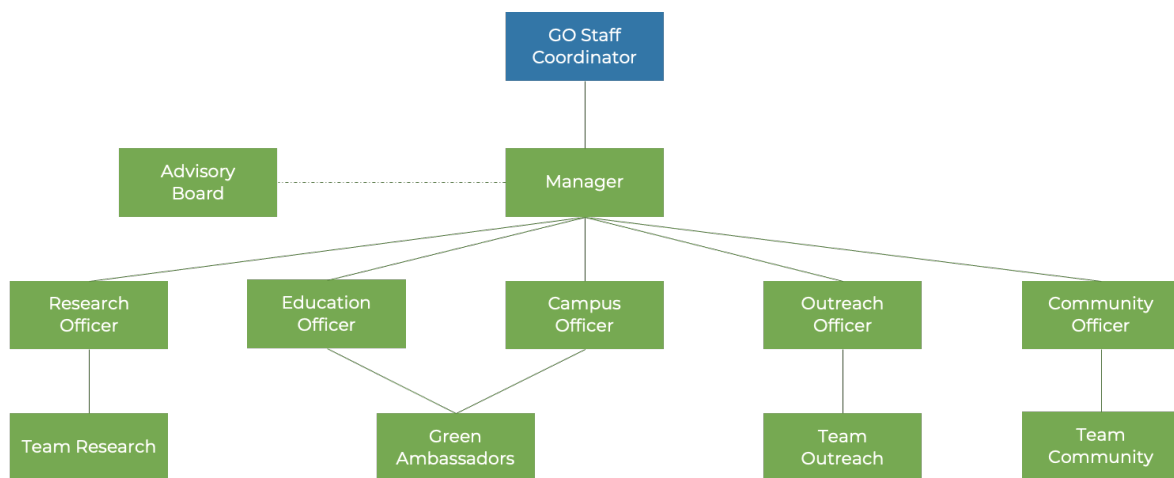
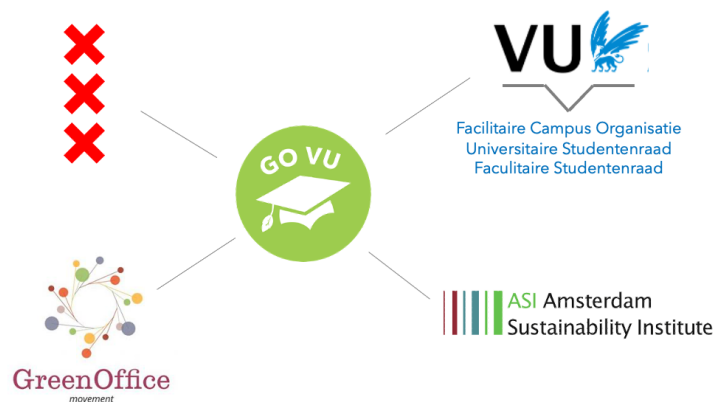


Fig 1. Green Office VU Organogram

As the student-led sustainability platform at the VU, we often find ourselves in constant connection with major stakeholders inside and outside of the VU. Here, we map ourselves within our network to understand how we are positioned and how we can make strategic decisions.

Fig 2. Green Office VU Stakeholder Map



MANAGEMENT

Our activities pushed for sustainability in the VU Agenda including the advancement of two important rankings: Times Higher Education 2020 placed VU as second among universities worldwide for Climate Action. Sustainabil 2020 also ranked the VU as the second most sustainable higher education institution in the Netherlands wherein the GO VU hosted the Ranking Night for Amsterdam under the supervision of Studenten voor Morgen.

We aspire to continue on being the functional and horizontally integrated platform and think tank for sustainability at the VU. The management portfolio executes the three central goals of the Green Office VU through the two main foci below.

Self-Sustaining Governance and Strategy Execution

Our People & Our Campus - The Green Office VU is a model of sustainability and a sustainable avenue wherein employees and students can practice sustainable citizenship and sustainability thrive within the university

Effective management of sustainability values and principles requires committed leadership, clear direction, strategic turnovers/continuity, and a focus on well-being. These factors will help us implement sustainability across our own organisation as well as within our sphere of influence. In order to achieve a self-sustaining Green Office, management will commit to the following:

- Green Office Trainings - a focus on the development of our employees is a key concept in sustainability. Our employees must be equipped with the tools and knowledge to understand sustainability. Hence, we will prioritise providing access to value-adding training for our employees in core skills such as: project management, public relations, effective communication, sustainability, design, soft skills, among other relevant skills for the GO employees.
- Yearly Strategy Policy - to establish a clear direction and our commitment to become a leader of sustainability, we coordinate the efforts of the Green Office with the Green Team and its clusters to promote synergy instead of overlapping projects. This will allow us to work towards our own strategy for 2025 and align our annual projects with the broader sustainability strategy of the university. We will allow for some flexibility and adaptation to help ensure ad hoc programs relevant to the strategy can still be implemented.
- Robust Recruitment - our recruitment strategy will also change in some way. We will favour internal promotion as we want to build from within and allow a smooth transition with future officers and to get engaged into the role with ease. This will be potentially more effective as they are familiar with processes within the organisation. However, recruitment is still open to any VU student and positions will be granted based on availability, merits, and knowledge.
 - **Special recruitment process:**
 - When a current GO Officer applies to continue his or her role, he/she will be excluded from the relevant recruiting process. The GO Manager will ask the team for feedback on the GO Officer applying to extend its term while conducting an interview with all applicants.
 - The GO Manager would select the best three candidates and deliberate with the GO Advisory Board (GOAB). After a week, the GOAB will issue advice on the best candidate, by simple majority vote.
 - The same process applies to the case of a GO manager applying but in this situation, the Chair of the GOAB will conduct the interviews and decide.

Transparency and Accountability Beyond our Organisation

Our Society - The Green Office VU is a leader and accelerator in transformation to sustainability



beyond the university grounds

Accountability to our employees and the university must be established and communicated clearly. This will help ensure that sustainability is well-integrated with our operations and understanding our performance can help develop our organisation throughout the coming years. In order to foster consistency and accountability within the Green Office, management will commit to the following tasks:

- Annual Reports - management will produce a yearly report on the GO VU Operations that will describe all the projects executed, key performance indicators, and its impact. We will also include a detailed budget plan and forecast 1-pager that will be kept up-to-date by management per quarter which will include details of income, salaries, administration and portfolio projects spending. This will be published during the Anniversary of the GO in October.
- Strategy 2025 Assessment - our aim is also to keep ourselves responsible for the implementation of our strategies and goals. An annual assessment of the strategy will be planned with the GO coordinator and Sustainability Lead to realise the challenges and opportunities that we must focus on.
- Monitoring and Evaluation - we will create a transparency section on our website that publishes public versions of our annual reports, strategy, and KPIs we have reached. This will help us be accountable to the public in the hope that we establish our presence more as the leader of sustainability for students at the university.



CAMPUS OPERATIONS

For our university to become a sustainable campus, our operations or the way we work must change. This Campus Operations portfolio historically had the highest number of projects and volunteers due to the diversity of its projects and the amount of work that they require. The GO VU will reduce the stress inherent to this position with the creation of the Green Ambassadors and making this position more strategic, focusing on project management. The strategy of this portfolio focus on two **main goals**:

1. In 2025, our campus emits zero waste, zero carbon energy, and zero emissions from the materials we consume
2. In 2025, all faculties and student organisations collaborate to lobby and maintain sustainable practices (e.g., materials, resources used, etc.)

Fewer Projects but with More Impact

In 2025, our campus emits zero waste, zero carbon energy, and zero emissions from the materials we consume

There are many small projects held by this portfolio. Some of them have an overall low impact on VU Sustainability. From now on the Campus Operations Officer should focus on a few projects with the highest impact while delegating the current small projects to Green Ambassadors (if they are interested), GO Volunteers (self-managed) or the Green Team. The COO will select only a few projects to work directly on based on a sounding project strategy. The impact of these projects can be measured in Kg of CO₂ equivalent pollution reduced/prevented.

Green Ambassadors

In 2025, all faculties and organisations collaborate to lobby and maintain sustainable practices (e.g., materials, resources used, etc.)

Our Green Ambassador program includes students from across faculties who focus on faculty operations and lobbying sustainability within their own faculties' systems. The Campus Operations Officer will continuously promote communication with the Ambassadors. The Ambassadors will present a bi-monthly report on operations, previously described in the Green Ambassadors chapter. Furthermore, the Campus Operations Officer will foster the cooperation between the Ambassadors using Microsoft Teams and Offline communication.

Green Partnerships

In 2025, all faculties and organisations collaborate to lobby and maintain sustainable practices (e.g., materials, resources used, etc.)

The GO has a longstanding relationship with Faculteit Campus Organisatie, one of our main stakeholders. In fact, within FCO there is a Programteam on Sustainability and the GO Manager is part of it. FCO has historically made great efforts towards sustainability and in the last FCO plan 'Sustainable Campus 2020-2025' they focus primarily on implementing the SDGs at the VU Campus. This collaboration has enabled projects such as Join the Pipe and the Recycling Experiment.

The implementation of the projects within the "Sustainable Campus 2025" policy will be benefited by a permanent and structured cooperation between the Campus Operations Officer and FCO. In order to achieve this, he will be invited to the ProgramTeam meetings. This will enable a direct link between all the FCO Stakeholders and the Campus Operation Officer, ultimately reinforcing our longstanding support to FCO and reducing redundant meetings. Furthermore, Management will advise other stakeholders relevant for VU Operations to directly address the Campus Operations Officer. The overall strategy of this portfolio to improve stakeholder engagement is done through the following:



- Get actively involved in the tendering process for waste, catering, office supplies, and any other contracts that must be renewed in the short- and longer-term as the procurement of the VU Campus is further developed. Particularly through the Programteam.
- Relationships with Spar, Doppio, Eurest and other future third parties located on Campus will be managed by the Campus Operations Officer or via delegation by a Green Operations Ambassador



EDUCATION

A university is tasked with a moral obligation to educate every person on one of the biggest challenges of today: sustainability. Thus, the Vrije Universiteit has committed to foster the development of the SDGs, including SDG number 4: Quality Education. The UN Agenda for 2030 states that all students should enjoy inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities.

As of 2020, the VU offers 301 courses (vs. 283 in 2019, + 106%) in which sustainability is integrated. 51.9% (n = 153, including Minors) of these courses are offered at the Bachelor's level while 48.1% are offered at the Master's level (n = 148)⁵. With this in mind, the Education portfolio focuses on **three main goals**:

1. In 2025, VU employees and students are empowered and educated with sustainability knowledge
2. In 2025, sustainability educational events are embedded in the ecosystem of the university
3. In 2025, all VU study programs and courses are sustainable

Sustainability Manual

In 2025, VU employees and students are empowered and educated with sustainability knowledge

At the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, students and employees were only allowed within the confines of their homes. In the opening of the academic year 2021, associations will be able to host much more physical activities, meaning that connecting with them straight at the beginning of a fresh start after the pandemic, should give us a great window of opportunity to implement more sustainable measures. We need to follow up on our sustainability manual and share it with student associations and employees so we can see to what extent it was used and how it can be improved for this year. Below are some activities that the education portfolio aim to achieve:

- Design generic (baseline) and targeted crash courses, workshops and lunch lectures for the wide array of different segments found at the VU employee and student audience. These courses will remain accessible to anyone from the VU Community. The level of detail and rigor of these courses will also be adapted.
- Set up the first pilots of the crash course for staff to gather feedback and improve their format and content.
- By the end of each academic year, roll-out at least 2 courses or other forms of educational activities, like workshops, per faculty/year to keep the staff and student associations updated and engaged with sustainability.

Sustainability Education Events

In 2025, sustainability educational events are embedded in the ecosystem of the university

The Education Officer will promote and coordinate educational conferences and events during the academic year open to different publics (within the VU and outside). These will be focused on specific topics and will include a wide array of formats: expert conferences, workshops, courses for student associations, etc.

The goal is to promote awareness on what sustainability means in practice with the educational activities as well as to motivate the VU Community to have their own sustainable initiatives. We will also create a space to develop informal educational formats that allow a more direct engagement with the participants and plant a seed for behavioural change within daily lives.

⁵ Statistics as of 2020 from the GO Course Inventory. For more details, please see [the executive report](#).

Sustainable Programs at the VU

In 2025, all VU study programs and courses are sustainable

We deeply support one of the Education goals of the VU Sustainability Roadmap 2025 in making all programs at the VU sustainable. Together with the Green Ambassadors program, co-led with the Campus Operations portfolio, we aim to lobby the university to increase the presence of sustainability in the academic offer by:

- Mapping all the current sustainability-related courses available for the year 2020-2021, organised by the degree of relevance to the theme (weak, medium, strong) by the end of January 2021. This can be taken one step further by including in the analysis courses that address sustainability through at least one (guest) lecture/ tutorial/ assignment. The intent of this is to identify gaps in the current curriculum in the hope to prioritise faculties with the lowest sustainability integration.
- Promoting and expanding the sustainability content within A Broader Mind and Community Service Learning projects. Support its transformation into a mandatory course. Proactively seek opportunities to integrate sustainability iCSL-based projects into Master courses.
- Curating the inventory of sustainability courses that is continuously updated every year to ensure that students and professors can utilise a tool that is accurate. We also aim to increase its accessibility every year by devising a dashboard with a search function or possibility to sort by some criteria. As a long-term goal, we seek a more efficient manner of updating courses that does not rely on manually reading the study guides. Discuss with relevant teaching staff.



RESEARCH

The VU was recently ranked in the Times Higher Education Impact Ranking as the second most active university in the world with regards to SDG 13: Climate Action. This was in part due to the excellent sustainability research performed at the VU. The Research portfolio seeks to uphold this excellence in a two-fold objective: cultivate a sustainability knowledge base and promote good research practices towards sustainability transformation. We achieve these through **three main goals**:

1. In 2025, students are given the opportunity to further their career with respect to sustainability
2. In 2025, students and employees are empowered in practicing sustainable knowledge transfer
3. In 2025, there are clear metrics in place to measure impact with respect to the SDGs and the results are communicated internally and externally and successes are widely celebrated

Green Action Lab

In 2025, students are given the opportunity to further their career with respect to sustainability

The GO will further develop its role as an avenue that connects and supports VU students and internal/external partners in order to increase the volume and quality of sustainability research conducted at the VU. The Green Action Lab⁶ matches students, researchers, VU partners, and external institutions through sustainability research. The scope of this lab includes sustainability-related theses, internships and third party case studies. This improvement will include the automation of some aspects of the hub to streamline processes and increase output volume, allowing manual work to be focused on tasks that will increase quality. Additionally, we will introduce a triage system to re-address the different types of enquiries that the Green Action Lab can handle, from simple sustainability questions to research projects.

Furthermore, the Research Officer and Outreach Officer commit to strengthening partnerships with the GO Research Network by improving communication with researchers, professors and sustainability-related institutes. Paying special attention to our partnership with the Institute for Environmental Sciences, Amsterdam Sustainability Institute and Net Impact Amsterdam.

Science for Sustainability for Students

In 2025, students and employees are empowered in practicing sustainable knowledge transfer

The Research portfolio will work to expand and integrate our **open access peer-reviewed journal**. The journal will continue to showcase high quality student articles in the field of sustainability, and will expand its scope to include Editorial and Conference Reports. We will professionalise the journal by ensuring we meet certain key criteria and by integrating the journal into the VU research ecosystem. We will promote the use of the SDG Dashboard as a measure of impact, which is an initiative from the VU Library, to improve the visibility of our research. We will foster research in relevant and/or under-researched topics by taking advantage of the expertise of the VU and collaborating with partners on special issues. Our expansion includes the following:

- Developing relevant KPIs and obtaining ISSN, DOIs, listings in the VU library and other appropriate abstracting and indexing services, etc.
- Revamping the journal web pages to ensure they include accurate information regarding scope, instructions for authors, guidelines and policies, impact and quality measures.

⁶ For more information on the Green Action Lab please see our [website](#) and [summary note](#).

- Creating a comprehensive journal strategy document by which to measure progress, including goals such as to publish at least one special issue in 2020, with two in 2021, etc.
- Developing reliable partnerships with key contacts around the VU, including ASI, IVM and the VU library, to ensure the smooth running of journal operations, such as peer review.

VU Sustainable Footprint

In 2025, there are clear metrics in place to measure impact with respect to the SDGs and the results are communicated internally and externally and successes are widely celebrated

The GO VU expansion and restructure will provide opportunities to engage in more impactful and complex projects. Some of these projects require advice from a scientific perspective regarding what is the most appropriate sustainable option. This will allow GO VU to effectively contribute to multiple large scale projects to inform decision making and have a greater positive impact within the VU. This will also provide a window of opportunity for the GO VU to assess and create a criteria or framework that measures impact with respect to the SDGs in different faculties and organisations. Examples of current projects in this category: GO VU x Faculty of Social Sciences Collaboration, GO x Digital@VU, SDG Tag with ASI and University Library.



COMMUNITY & OUTREACH

Our image is important. Image and our partnerships expand our visibility inside and outside the boundaries of the campus, and our on-campus presence creates the necessary bond that an engaged community of individuals needs to thrive. The Community & Outreach portfolios aim to ignite the powerful spark of the GO VU. The strategy of these portfolio will focus on three **main goals**:

1. In 2025, students, employees, and external stakeholders have nurtured a ‘sustainable’ attitude within their lives
2. In 2025, sustainability educational events are embedded in the culture of the university
3. In 2025, students and employees have created positive impactful partnerships with like-minded external stakeholders striving for sustainability

Sustainable You

In 2025, students, employees, and external stakeholders have nurtured a ‘sustainable’ attitude within their lives

In order to instill a sustainable attitude in each and every person at the VU and beyond, we will continuously engage tips and tricks to show how easy it is to be sustainable with everyday actions.

“Sustainable You” will educate on small actions with high impact in the ecosystems that anyone can easily do. We will try to focus on “low hanging fruits” and quick impact. Since the start of this project in **January 2020 we doubled our audience on Instagram alone** and will probably reach 3k followers by 2021. The end goal is to have 10K followers by 2025 and be seen as a sustainable influencer platform.

Furthermore, our online communication will include relevant campaigns on specific topics as changes updates of the Green Office (New strategies, recruitment, challenges) and, in some cases, third parties events and communications.

Moreover, our website is part of this digital movement where it is important to keep up to date information so we are able to empower everyone on being sustainable. We will continue to rethink the functionality and design of the website to better integrate it with our social media while making it more self-sustaining in the coming years to avoid changes in our image. One of the main focuses of this revamp will be to allow easy updates and modifications to the website with minimum technical knowledge.

A Green Community

In 2025, sustainability educational events are embedded in the culture of the university

The people that form the GO Community are the soul and spark of the GO VU. We will reignite that spark despite a year of limited interaction due to the pandemic. We do this by relaunching events for our offline community.

We will change this by actively promoting a GO Community that will motivate, support and educate its members on sustainability. We also seek to enjoy the benefits of networking effects with Brainstorming, Ideas-sharing and other events that will unite our community.

Furthermore, the GO Community will increase our visibility at the campus and the willingness of the VU Community to participate in sustainability projects. This will allow us to better connect to other student communities such as AUREUS, ESN VU, Enactus, USR in order to create common events. Some strategic projects are listed below:

- Explore different formats as GO Members only, Public Events and **Collaborative events with other VU Communities.**



- Set a **sustainability ideas digital box** that will allow us to have a continuous wealth of ideas that can be used to create new initiatives for the Green Ambassadors, the GOVU or the Green Team.

Sustainable Outreach

In 2025, students and employees have created positive impactful partnerships with like-minded external stakeholders striving for sustainability

It is imperative to effectively cooperate with potential and current partners that are not located on the university campus itself to have a deeper positive impact on the VU Community and to promote the VU reputation as a sustainable university.

The city of Amsterdam has expressed its ambitions towards becoming a fully circular city by 2050. To achieve this it is necessary to act upon three key areas: Construction, Biomass and Food, and Consumer Goods. These are complex areas that involve multiple stakeholders responsible for the generation of different flows, such as traffic, waste, logistics services, food flows, and biodiversity. The Outreach portfolio will work together with relevant stakeholders to integrate and support the influence area of the VU Community within the Municipality of Amsterdam plans for sustainability, specially the Doughnut Framework. Moreover, the Outreach portfolio will continue creating strong connections with the Green Offices around the world. This will help us learn from each other and understand what can work to improve our own systems. This goal can be executed in many ways but an example would be to represent the GO VU in external events and perhaps coordinate or co-host events with other organisations.

