

UNDERSTANDING BARRIERS TO SUSTAINABILITY ADOPTION FOR ARIZONA



SMALL BUSINESSES, NONPROFITS, AND
ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AGENCIES



Understanding Barriers to Sustainability Adoption for Arizona Small Businesses, Nonprofits, and Economic Development Agencies

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*** Participant details have been redacted to maintain anonymity. ***

Executive Summary

This white paper presents the findings of a capstone project conducted by one team within the inaugural IEDC / Flinn Foundation Arizona Sustainable Economic Development Learning Lab, a statewide initiative focused on equipping economic development professionals with the tools to integrate and advance sustainable strategies in their work. The project focused on understanding and identifying barriers to sustainability uptake by small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies while exploring actionable solutions tailored to Arizona's unique economic and environmental context.

Through a robust mixed-method research process, including a statewide survey of 125 organizations, 12 stakeholder interviews, and a comprehensive scan of over 30 sustainability tools and 50+ funding programs, the team uncovered the real-world challenges that prevent organizations from integrating cost-saving, environmentally responsible practices. These include lack of awareness, limited staff and time capacity, unclear return on investment, and difficulty navigating incentives.

Despite these barriers, the research revealed strong interest in practical sustainability solutions: 85% of surveyed organizations expressed willingness to pilot a sustainability planning tool, provided it is easy to use, sector-specific, and supported by funding access and technical assistance.

This report outlines those desired support mechanisms, identifies opportunities for statewide collaboration, and proposes a framework for a localized sustainability planning tool, tentatively named the *Arizona Sustainability Navigator*. It also lays the groundwork for future fundraising, stakeholder engagement, and tool deployment based on the research findings.

1. Introduction

Sustainability has become a defining consumer expectation. A 2025 PwC Global study found that 44% of consumers are willing to spend extra on sustainable goods, even amid inflation and higher living costs. For Gen Z and Millennials, whose purchasing power is estimated at \$3–4 trillion, sustainability is more than a preference, it's a trust factor that directly shapes buying decisions. These customers are 27% more likely than older generations to choose brands that demonstrate care for people and the planet.

Despite this strong market signal, small businesses economic development agencies often struggle to integrate sustainable practices. An IBM study shows that while 90% of large corporations embed environmental initiatives into their strategies, only 67% of small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) do the same. Reported barriers include limited budgets, lack of expertise, and time and staff constraints.

Nonprofit organizations are inherently focused on creating social good and are often seen as more trustworthy than for-profit organizations. When it comes to adopting sustainability practices, there is an opportunity for improved financial stability and increased donor attraction which in turn can increase long-term impact of the nonprofit. In the same way that Gen Z and Millennials are looking for more sustainably minded options in the products or services they purchase, these groups are also looking for pathways to become more conscious donors often actively seeking out nonprofits with strong sustainability practices. Furthermore, a nonprofit's core mission is often tied to the community it serves and by demonstrating a commitment to environmental stewardship the organization is leading by example which helps to inspire the community, amplifying overall impact.

This capstone project, developed through the International Economic Development Council (IEDC)'s Arizona Sustainable Economic Development Learning Lab, set out to explore why many small organizations underutilize sustainability tools, even when those resources are free or low-cost. In partnership with Collaboration for Good, the City of Phoenix, and the City of Surprise, the collaborators engaged Arizona small businesses, nonprofits and economic development agencies directly to understand their challenges and identify practical, actionable solutions.

Nonprofits are playing an increasingly strategic role in helping small and medium-sized businesses (SMBs) adopt sustainable practices. Where limited capital, expertise, and time often stall ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) progress, mission-driven organizations step in with practical, community-rooted solutions.

Groups like Local First Arizona and the Arizona Sustainability Alliance provide tailored ESG support that lowers barriers to entry, from free or low-cost training and industry-specific toolkits to peer learning cohorts and direct consulting. They also connect SMBs to funding streams for grants, clean energy incentives, and low-interest financing, bridging the capital gap that often prevents smaller enterprises from investing in sustainability.

Beyond resources, nonprofits create collaborative ecosystems that give small businesses a voice and stronger footing in the transition to a low-carbon economy. They link entrepreneurs with municipal climate initiatives, universities, and local consumers to shape policies and programs that reflect real small business needs. Many also embed sustainability into workforce development, food systems, and urban greening, aligning environmental progress with local equity and resilience goals.

By democratizing access to ESG tools, unlocking funding, and fostering partnerships, nonprofits make sustainability a shared opportunity rather than an advantage reserved for large corporations. Their work ensures small businesses can compete, and thrive, in a marketplace where sustainability increasingly builds trust and long-term growth.

The findings matter not only for the environment but also for local economic resilience. In Arizona, where water scarcity, high energy use, and rapid growth converge, sustainability adoption offers long-term cost savings, greater business stability, and untapped opportunities for small organizations' advancement.

2. Collaborators



A mission-driven consultancy specializing in social impact strategy, sustainable solutions, storytelling, and data design. Led project conception, survey design, interview synthesis, and white paper development. Conducted nonprofit outreach, interviews and research.



Phoenix's Community and Economic Development department helps existing businesses grow and expand, attracts new business opportunities to the city, and trains and grows a workforce pipeline to fill increasing career opportunities. Assisted background research, survey design and delivery, and conducted economic development stakeholder interviews.



The City of Surprise Economic Development Department fosters economic growth in the City of Surprise. Assisted background research, survey design and delivery, and conducted economic development stakeholder interviews.

3. Methodology

To ensure that this initiative was grounded in the lived experiences of Arizona's small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies, we employed a mixed-method research strategy that combined quantitative breadth with qualitative depth. The goal was not only to identify barriers to sustainability adoption, but to understand them in context, through the voices of those navigating them daily. This approach included a statewide survey, targeted stakeholder interviews, and a comprehensive scan of existing tools and funding programs. Together, these methods provided a 360-degree view of the sustainability landscape and informed every recommendation in this report.

3.1 Survey Deployment

To gather broad, quantitative insight across Arizona's sustainability landscape, we deployed a statewide survey targeting small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies. The survey was designed to capture organizational characteristics, sustainability actions taken, tools used, barriers faced, and desired supports. Outreach was conducted between September 5, 2025 through October 3, 2025, or approximately over a little more than three weeks, via email, social media, newsletters, and partner networks to ensure diverse participation across sectors and regions.

- 125 responses from Arizona-based small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies
- Questions explored organizational type, size, sustainability actions taken, tools used, barriers faced, and desired support
- Outreach via email, social media, newsletters, and partner networks

3.2 Stakeholder Interviews

To complement the survey data with qualitative depth, we conducted targeted interviews with leaders from three key groups: economic development agencies, nonprofit organizations, and small business support networks. These conversations provided firsthand perspectives on challenges and barriers to adopting sustainability strategies, revealed sector-specific nuances, and surfaced practical insights that shaped the recommendations in this report.

Economic Development Agencies

- Robert Theobald, VP, Small Business Services, Arizona Commerce Authority
- Jeff McCormick, Economic Development Manager, City of Flagstaff
- Danae Presler, Climate Manager, City of Flagstaff
- Barbra Coffee, Director of Economic Initiatives, City of Tucson

Nonprofit Organizations

- Tammy McLeod, President & CEO, Flinn Foundation

- Jhenifer Krutz Shipe, President & CEO, Keep Phoenix Beautiful
- Ryan Gurr, Coordinator, Circular Arizona
- Nicolas de la Fuente, Director, Environmental Strategy, Arizona Community Foundation

Small Business Networks & Support Organizations

- Nick Shivka, Senior Manager of Sustainability Initiatives, Local First Arizona
- Shyaam Ramkumar, Partner Success Manager & Arizona Head of Sustainability, Plug and Play Tech Center
- Louie Picazo, Entrepreneur Success Manager, Arizona Small Business Association (ASBA)

3.3 Resource & Funding Landscape Scan

To contextualize our findings and identify existing infrastructure, we conducted a comprehensive scan of sustainability tools and funding programs available to Arizona's small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies. This scan helped illuminate gaps, overlaps, and opportunities for integration, ensuring that future solutions build on, rather than duplicate, current offerings.

- Cataloged 30+ emissions calculators and sustainability planning tools
- Identified Arizona-based programs: APS Going Green, SRP PowerWise, ASU Energy Efficiency Center, Local First Arizona's Green Business Bootcamp
- Compiled 50+ grant programs from EPA, ADEQ, WIFA, HUD, APS, SRP, and Arizona Community Foundation

This triangulated methodology allowed us to surface both systemic challenges and practical opportunities. The survey quantified common pain points and preferences, while interviews revealed the nuance behind those numbers, from cultural hesitations to operational constraints. By integrating these data streams, we've created a foundation for the Arizona Sustainability Navigator that is not only evidence-based, but community-informed and implementation-ready.

4. Findings

The findings presented in this section reflect the core insights uncovered through our mixed-method research process. By engaging Arizona's small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies directly, we were able to move beyond assumptions and surface the realities of sustainability adoption on the ground. The data reveals a landscape marked by both untapped potential and persistent friction: while many tools and incentives already exist, they are often underutilized due to structural and perceptual barriers. At the same time, organizations expressed a clear desire for practical, easy-to-use tools that align with their capacity and context. These findings not only validate the need for a localized sustainability planning tool, but they also shape its design, delivery, and strategic priorities.

Ultimately, many small businesses and non-profit organizations may not know where to start (23.66%), but the biggest barriers they selected in the survey were: lack of time or staff capacity (34.41%); costs that are either too expensive or an unclear return on investment potential (33.3%); or uncertainty about what tools may apply to their organization (33.3%). Stakeholder interviews confirmed these findings; i.e., small businesses and non-profits must prioritize maintaining their operations, thus resulting in sustainability considerations often falling to the wayside without a clear, simple, streamlined solution that they can correlate to their bottom line.

4.1 Existing Tools

Arizona is not starting from scratch. The state has many municipalities or business support networks that already offer a wide array of sustainability diagnostics, training, and incentives, many of which are free or low-cost. These tools are designed to help organizations reduce energy and water use, minimize waste, and improve operational efficiency. However, despite their availability, many small businesses and nonprofits remain unaware of these resources or unsure how to access them.

Type of Diagnostic or Service	What It Does	Potential Value
Energy audits	Identifies excess energy use and suggests improvements	Qualifies for rebates; reduces bills
Water usage assessments	Finds leaks and inefficiencies	Saves water and lowers costs
Waste audits	Identifies recycling and reduction opportunities	Reduces disposal costs
Transportation/fleet assessments	Evaluates fuel use and routes	Enables EV adoption and fuel savings
Green business trainings	Workshops and certifications	Builds internal capacity and customer trust
Benchmarking tools	Tracks energy, water, and waste	Measures ROI and progress over time

These tools are typically offered through utility providers, local governments, and nonprofit partners. However, fragmentation across programs and inconsistent outreach have limited their impact. Many small organizations report feeling overwhelmed by the number of options or unsure which tools apply to their specific context. This underscores the need for a centralized, easy-to-navigate platform that curates and contextualizes these resources for Arizona's diverse business landscape.

Existing diagnostics and resources:

- Energy audits
- Water usage assessments
- Waste audits
- Transportation/fleet assessments
- Green business trainings
- Benchmarking tools

Programs include:

- APS “Going Green & Going Smart”
- SRP PowerWise
- ASU Energy Efficiency Center
- Local First Arizona Bootcamp

- Arizona Clean Energy Hub
- USDA REAP
- Maricopa SBDC

4.2 Barriers to Adoption

Despite the availability of tools and incentives, many Arizona organizations face persistent challenges that prevent meaningful sustainability adoption. Survey responses and stakeholder interviews revealed a consistent set of barriers that go beyond simple awareness, they reflect structural, operational, and psychological hurdles that small businesses and nonprofits encounter when trying to act on sustainability.

Barrier	% Reporting	Insight
Lack of time/staff capacity	34%	Solo operators and small teams lack bandwidth.
Upfront cost & unclear ROI	33%	Mistrust of sales-driven tactics; lack of clarity on payback.
Unsure what applies	33%	Tools feel too corporate or irrelevant to small orgs.
Don't know where to start	23.6%	Fragmented programs create “analysis paralysis.”
Difficulty accessing rebates/incentives	19%	Applications are complex and time-consuming.

These barriers were echoed in interviews, especially among organizations serving under-resourced communities. Many stakeholders noted that sustainability tools often feel designed for large corporations, not small businesses or nonprofits. The combination of limited time, unclear financial benefits, and confusing eligibility criteria creates a high-friction environment that discourages action. Addressing these barriers requires not just better tools, but better framing, delivery, and support.

4.3 Desired Supports

While barriers are significant, the survey also revealed a strong appetite for sustainability, if the right support is in place. Respondents were clear about what they need: practical tools, funding access, personalized guidance, and peer examples. These preferences reflect a desire for simplicity, relevance, and community-based learning.

Support Type	% Reporting	Description
Access to funding or grants	63.41%	Grants, rebates, and simplified application processes
Help identifying rebates and financial incentives	48.78%	Cost matters to small businesses and non-profits
Personalized recommendations	45.12%	Sector-specific strategies and ROI clarity
Clear planning tools	43.9%	Step-by-step guidance tailored to business type
Training/webinars	35.37%	Internal capacity building
Expert assistance for one-on-one business support or technical assistance	28.05%	One-on-one technical support
Peer examples	24.39%	Case studies from similar organizations

These findings directly informed the design principles for the proposed sustainability planning tool. Organizations want more than a checklist, they want a roadmap that reflects their sector, size, and capacity. They also want to see proof that sustainability works for businesses like theirs. By combining diagnostics, funding guidance, and peer-led learning, Arizona can create a support ecosystem that turns interest into action.

5. Opportunities & Recommendations

The barriers identified in both the survey and interviews point to clear, actionable opportunities for statewide intervention. Rather than requiring new infrastructure, many solutions involve reframing existing programs, simplifying access, and embedding sustainability into familiar support systems. Below is a summary of the top barriers and corresponding recommendations, each grounded in stakeholder insight and aligned with Arizona's economic development landscape:

Barrier	Recommendation
Low awareness	Create a statewide sustainability resource hub with plain-language guidance
Time constraints	Embed sustainability into existing business support systems
Funding concerns	Develop rebate navigators and microloan programs
Peer influence	Expand cohort models like Local First's bootcamp
Lack of clarity	Build ROI calculators and case studies

These recommendations reflect a shift from one-size-fits-all toolkits to localized, sector-specific strategies. By integrating sustainability into permitting processes, SBDC advising, and entrepreneurship hubs like Spark Surprise in the City of Surprise, Arizona can meet small businesses where they are, reducing friction and increasing adoption. Similarly, funding navigators and ROI calculators can demystify financial benefits, while peer-led cohorts offer the social proof and shared learning that many organizations need to take the first step.

Additional Recommendations:

- Integrate emissions calculators tools into the process
- Build searchable grant navigator
- Pilot in Phoenix and Surprise
- Partner with Flinn Foundation and universities
- Align with the ACA (Arizona Commerce Authority) and Councils of Governments

6. Next Phase: Tool Development & Fundraising Strategy

The research findings and stakeholder insights presented in this white paper lay a clear foundation for the next phase: designing, funding, and deploying a localized sustainability planning tool tailored to Arizona's small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies. This phase is not just about building a product, it's about building trust, accessibility, and long-term impact. The goal is to translate interest into action by offering a tool that is intuitive, sector-specific, and embedded within existing support systems. To do this, we must align technical development with strategic fundraising and stakeholder co-design.

Priorities:

- Finalize tool framework and onboarding
- Launch fundraising campaign
- Engage stakeholders for co-design
- Integrate technical assistance and calculators
- Create centralized sustainability hub

Funding sources:

- EPA Pollution Prevention and EJ Grants
- ADEQ Water Quality Improvement Grants
- APS and SRP Giving Programs
- Arizona Community Foundation
- USDA REAP
- HUD ICDBG
- WIFA Revolving Funds
- National Forest Foundation

Success in this phase will depend on cross-sector collaboration, sustained engagement, and commitment to iterative refinement. By leveraging existing programs, tapping into federal and philanthropic funding, and piloting the tool in real-world environments like Spark Surprise and TeamPHX, we can ensure that the solution is both practical and scalable. This is a pivotal moment to move from insight to implementation, and to position Arizona as a national leader in inclusive, small-organization-centered sustainability innovation.

7. Project Evolution & Key Insights

What began as a focused inquiry by one capstone team within the inaugural IEDC / Flinn Foundation Sustainability Learning Lab has evolved into a data-driven blueprint for advancing sustainability adoption among Arizona's small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies. As part of a multi-group cohort, our team engaged 125 survey respondents and conducted 12 in-depth interviews with stakeholders across sectors. This diverse input revealed a persistent tension: while sustainability is increasingly demanded by customers and recognized as a competitive advantage, small organizations remain overwhelmed by scattered resources, unclear payback, and limited capacity.

Through this process, our team moved from diagnosis to collaboration. Partners, including Collaboration for Good, the City of Phoenix, the City of Surprise, and a range of nonprofit organizations, business networks, and economic development agencies, began to align around a shared vision: sustainability that is localized, actionable, and accessible. The research surfaced not only the tools and funding streams already available, but also the human factors limiting their use: confusion, mistrust of sales-driven offerings, and resource constraints. The result is a strategic framework for support systems and practical instruments tailored to Arizona's unique environmental and economic realities.

8. Strategic Path Forward: The Arizona Sustainability Navigator

The insights gathered through this initiative point to a clear mandate: Arizona's small businesses, nonprofits, and government agencies are ready to act on sustainability, if the tools are accessible, relevant, and easy to use. Survey respondents overwhelmingly called for plain-language guidance, specific recommendations, and streamlined access to funding. In response, the initiative is advancing a bold next step: the development of the **Arizona Sustainability Navigator**, a localized planning tool designed to meet organizations where they are. This next phase will focus on three coordinated priorities that translate research into measurable action, build statewide capacity, and position Arizona as a national leader in inclusive sustainability innovation.

To translate these findings into measurable action, the initiative will now focus on three coordinated priorities:

1. Fundraising & Resource Mobilization

Secure capital to build and sustain the proposed sustainability planning tool and its support network. Pursue EPA and ADEQ grants, utility programs (APS, SRP), major philanthropic partners such as the Arizona Community Foundation, and targeted federal programs (USDA REAP, HUD ICDBG). Private sponsorships and foundation partnerships will also be cultivated to underwrite technical assistance and incentive programs.

2. Cohort Development & Community Learning

Launch pilot cohorts of small businesses, nonprofits, and economic development agencies to test and refine the tool in real settings. These peer groups will mirror successful models like Local First Arizona's bootcamps, creating spaces to demystify sustainability, exchange practical solutions, and provide user feedback. Cohorts will also build networks of ambassadors who can mentor new adopters and strengthen statewide capacity.

3. Marketing & Public Awareness

Elevate sustainability as a competitive advantage for Arizona enterprises. A coordinated marketing strategy will tell success stories, share data on cost savings and resilience, and partner with chambers of commerce, entrepreneurial hubs, and local governments. The goal is to increase trust, drive adoption, and establish Arizona as a leader in small-organization sustainability innovation.

Together, these priorities form the backbone of a scalable, community-driven strategy. By securing diverse funding streams, launching peer-led pilot cohorts, and elevating public awareness, the Arizona Sustainability Navigator will become more than a tool, it will be a movement. One that empowers small organizations to reduce costs, build resilience, and contribute to a more sustainable future. As we move forward, continued stakeholder engagement and iterative refinement will ensure that the Navigator remains responsive,

effective, and rooted in the lived realities of Arizona's entrepreneurial and nonprofit communities.

9. Acknowledgments

This project would not have been possible without the generous time, insight, and collaboration of dozens of individuals and organizations across Arizona. From economic development leaders to nonprofit executives and small business advocates, each stakeholder contributed a unique perspective that shaped the direction and depth of this work. Their candor, creativity, and commitment to sustainability were instrumental in identifying both the barriers and the opportunities that define this landscape.

Economic Development Agencies

- Robert Theobald, Arizona Commerce Authority
- Jeff McCormick & Danae Presler, City of Flagstaff
- Barbra Coffee, City of Tucson

Nonprofit Organizations

- Tammy McLeod, Flinn Foundation
- Jhenifer Krutz Shipe, Keep Phoenix Beautiful
- Ryan Gurr, Circular Arizona
- Nicolas de la Fuente, Arizona Community Foundation

Small Business Networks

- Nick Shivka, Local First Arizona
- Shyaam Ramkumar, Plug and Play Tech Center
- Louie Picazo, ASBA

We extend our deepest gratitude to all survey respondents and interview participants for sharing their experiences and expertise. Their voices are not just reflected in this report – they are the foundation of the solutions it proposes. As we move into the next phase of tool development and deployment, we look forward to continued partnership, shared learning, and collective impact. Together, we can build a more resilient, equitable, and sustainable Arizona.

10. Contact us

The Arizona Sustainability Navigator is committed to building a statewide ecosystem of support, collaboration, and innovation. Whether you're a small business owner, nonprofit leader, funder, policymaker, or sustainability advocate, we welcome your partnership and input as we move into the next phase of tool development and deployment.

To stay connected, share feedback, or explore collaboration opportunities, reach out through any of the channels below:

-  **Email:** arizonasustainabilitynavigator@gmail.com
-  **Website:** www.arizonasustainabilitynavigator.com (*Launching in 2026*)
-  **Instagram:** [instagram.com/arizonasustainabilitynavigator](https://www.instagram.com/arizonasustainabilitynavigator)
-  **X (formerly Twitter):** x.com/azsustainnav
-  **LinkedIn:** [linkedin.com/company/arizona-sustainability-navigator](https://www.linkedin.com/company/arizona-sustainability-navigator)

We look forward to hearing from you and working together to make sustainability simple, accessible, and impactful for all Arizona organizations.

11. Appendix

- A. Survey Administration
- B. Stakeholder Interview Process
- C. Survey Results
- D. Branding

A. Survey Administration Overview

The survey was administered using **SurveyMonkey** and managed in collaboration with the **City of Surprise Economic Development and Marketing & Communications Departments**. Distribution occurred through a combination of partner networks and social media channels to ensure broad community reach. To enhance engagement and data quality, we developed distinct survey links for each of our three primary target audiences—small businesses, nonprofit organizations, and economic development agencies.

A variety of tailored communications were employed, customized to both the medium and the intended audience. Dedicated messaging was created for social media platforms to encourage participation and visibility, while partner organizations integrated the survey into their own communications to extend outreach and strengthen stakeholder engagement.

Sustainable Practices Readiness Survey

Description:

As part of an International Economic Development Council (IEDC) + Flinn Foundation sustainability capstone project, we're identifying ways to help Arizona businesses save money, operate more efficiently, and strengthen long-term success. Your input will guide the creation of more practical assessment and planning tools tailored for local business needs. This short survey is open to small businesses, entrepreneurs, and nonprofits across Arizona. Estimated time: 3–5 minutes.

SECTION 1: Organization Snapshot

Q1 – What best describes your organization?

Question type: Multiple choice (select one)

- Small business
- Nonprofit
- Entrepreneur/start-up
- Tribal-affiliated organization
- Other (please specify) → *Enable “Other” option*

Q2 – How many employees do you currently have?

Question type: Checkboxes (select one)

- Just me (solo owner/operator)
- 2-5
- 6-20
- 21-50
- 50+

SECTION 2: Sustainable Awareness & Actions

Q3 – Have you taken any steps to make your organization more environmentally sustainable?

Question type: Checkboxes (select all that apply)

- Energy efficiency (e.g. switched to LED light bulbs or energy-efficient equipment)
- Water conservation (e.g. installed low flow toilets, xeriscape landscaping)
- Waste reduction/recycling (e.g. compost food scraps, provide reusable dishware, paperless policy)
- Sustainable transportation (e.g. carpool incentive for employees, EV charging station on-site)
- Local/ethical purchasing (e.g. purchasing produce from farmer's markets, using supplies that are Fair Trade Certified or produced ethically)
- Employee engagement in sustainability (e.g. office green team, mandatory volunteer time).
- Other: _____

Q4 – What sustainability-related tools, services, or programs (if any) has your organization already used or explored?

Question type: Checkboxes (select all that apply)

- Energy audits (from utility providers or consultants)
- Local green business programs (e.g., Phoenix Green Business Leaders)
- Federal or state sustainability grants or incentives
- Certifications (e.g., LEED, ENERGY STAR, Green Business Certification)
- Sustainability consultants or technical assistance providers
- Online tools or calculators to measure your environmental impact (e.g., carbon footprint estimators)
- None
- Other (please specify) → *Enable “Other” option*

Q5 – What are the biggest challenges or barriers to using any new potential sustainability tools for your organization? *Question type:* Multiple choice (select up to 3)

- I don't know where to start
- Too expensive or unclear return on investment potential
- Lack of time/staff capacity
- Unsure what applies to my type of organization
- Difficulty finding assistance with applying for rebates, programs, incentives, etc.
- Lack of internal support or buy-in
- Not a current priority
- Not interested
- Other: _____

SECTION 3: Tool Design Input/Interest in Future Support

Q6 – What kind of support would make it easier for your organization to implement sustainable practices?

Question type: Checkboxes (select all that apply)

- A clear, easy-to-use planning tool or online resource to be referenced at our convenience
- Personalized recommendations based on location and/or type of business
- Help identifying rebates and financial incentives
- Help identifying cost-saving opportunities
- Access to experts for 1-on-1 business support, or technical assistance
- Free workshops, training or webinars
- Access to funding or grants
- Peer examples or case studies
- Other (please specify) → *Enable “Other” option*

Q7 – What features would make a cost-saving sustainability planning tool most useful to your organization?

Question type: Paragraph (Open answer)

Q8 – Would you be interested in testing or giving feedback on a new cost-savings focused sustainability planning tool designed specifically for Arizona businesses?

Question type: Multiple choice

- Yes
- Maybe / want to learn more
- No

Q9 – Anything else you’d like us to know about your needs, experiences, or goals around sustainability?

Question type: Paragraph (Open answer)

SECTION 4: Stay Connected (Optional)

Would you like to stay in touch or be invited to test an Arizona Sustainability Planning Tool developed as a result of this capstone project?

If yes, please share your contact details below. This information will only be used for project-related communication and won’t be shared beyond the project.

Q10 – Name:

Question type: Short answer

Q11 – Organization (if applicable):

Question type: Short answer

Q12 – Email address:

Question type: Short answer

Q13 – Phone number (optional):

Question type: Short answer

Confirmation Message:

Thank you for lending your voice!

Your insights will help shape a free-or-low-cost Arizona-focused tool to make it easier for local businesses and nonprofits to save money, work smarter, and grow, all while putting smart, sustainable practices into action.

We'll share the results with you this fall so you can see how your feedback is making a difference.

B. Stakeholder Interviews Overview

Stakeholder interviews were conducted primarily via **virtual conferencing applications like Zoom**, with **email correspondence** used when scheduling or personal connection was not possible. These interviews were designed to **complement and deepen the findings** from the survey by providing qualitative insights and contextual understanding.

Through these conversations, we sought to gather additional perspectives that would **inform future initiatives, identify collaboration opportunities, and strengthen relationships** with potential partners. Numerous organizations across sectors were invited to participate, ensuring a diverse range of voices and experiences were represented.

Stakeholder Interview Questions

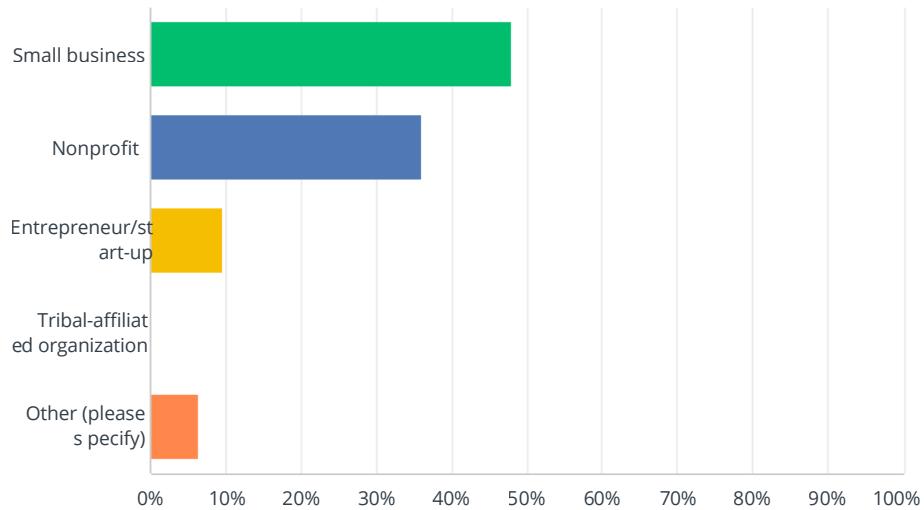
1. What sustainability-related tools, services or programs (if any) have your clients or your own organization already used or explored?
2. What have been the biggest challenges or barriers to using these tools, services or programs? From your organizational perspective as well as your clients' perspective.
3. What kind of support do your clients typically request and how often does sustainability come up as a requested tool/strategy if at all?
4. How familiar or comfortable are you with suggesting sustainability solutions?
5. How aware are you and/or your clients of the sustainability tools available at the federal, state, and local levels?
6. How likely would you or your clients be to utilize a sustainability tool/solution if it was easily accessible and free or low cost?
7. Would you be interested in future engagement and report of findings?

C. Survey Results

Sustainable Practices Readiness Survey

Q1 What best describes your organization?

Answered: 125 Skipped: 2

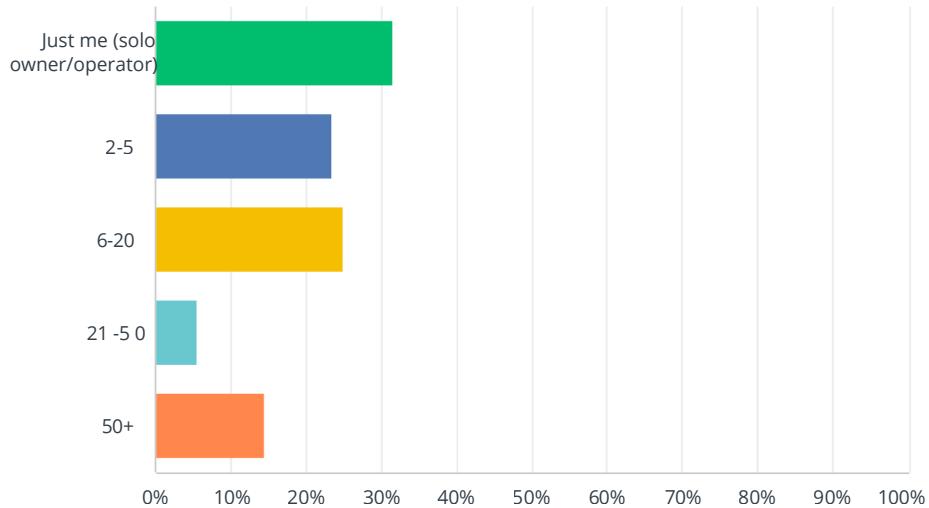


ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Small business	48.00%
Nonprofit	36.00%
Entrepreneur/start-up	9.60%
Tribal-affiliated organization	0.00%
Other (please specify)	6.40%
TOTAL	125

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Nonprofit Association	5:40 PM
2	Investor	9/29/2025 12:26 PM
3	Venture Capital	9/29/2025 9:36 AM
4	MVNO	9/25/2025 11:44 AM
5	A&E	9/24/2025 7:22 AM
6	large business	9/24/2025 5:04 AM
7	Nonprofit Consultant (C Corp)	9/10/2025 11:32 AM
8	large business (100k employees)	9/9/2025 1:06 PM

Q2 How many employees do you currently have?

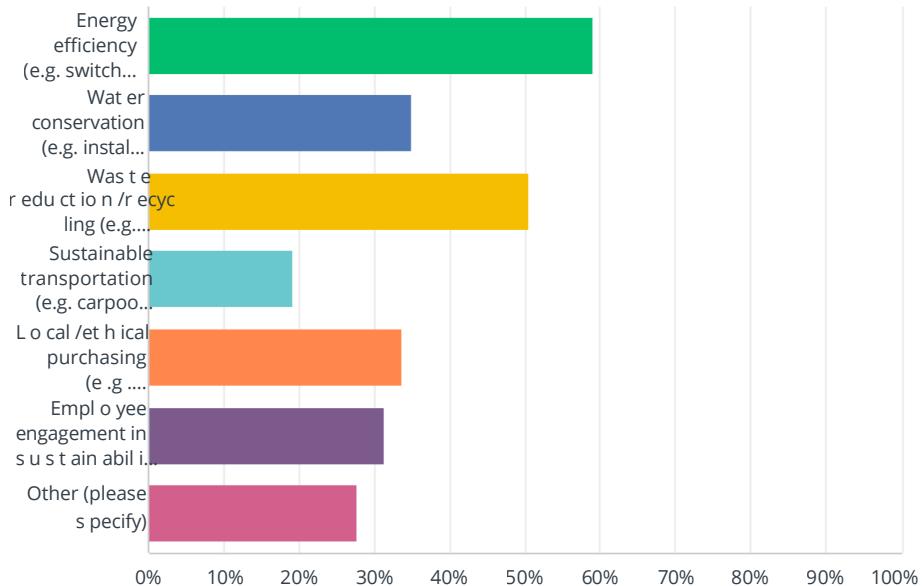
Answered: 124 Skipped: 3



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Just me (solo owner/operator)	31.45%	39
2-5	23.39%	29
6-20	25.00%	31
21-50	5.65%	7
50+	14.52%	18
TOTAL		124

Q3 Have you taken any steps to make your organization more environmentally sustainable? (select all that apply)

Answered: 83 Skipped: 44



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
Energy efficiency (e.g. switched to LED light bulbs or energy-efficient equipment)	59.04% 49
Water conservation (e.g. installed low flow toilets, xeriscape landscaping)	34.94% 29
Waste reduction/recycling (e.g. compost food scraps, provide reusable dishware, paperless policy)	50.60% 42
Sustainable transportation (e.g. carpool incentive for employees, EV charging station on-site)	19.28% 16
Local/ethical purchasing (e.g. purchasing produce from farmer's markets, using supplies that are Fair Trade Certified or produced ethically)	33.73% 28
Employee engagement in sustainability (e.g. office green team, mandatory volunteer time).	31.26% 26
Other (please specify)	33% 23
Total Respondents: 83	27.

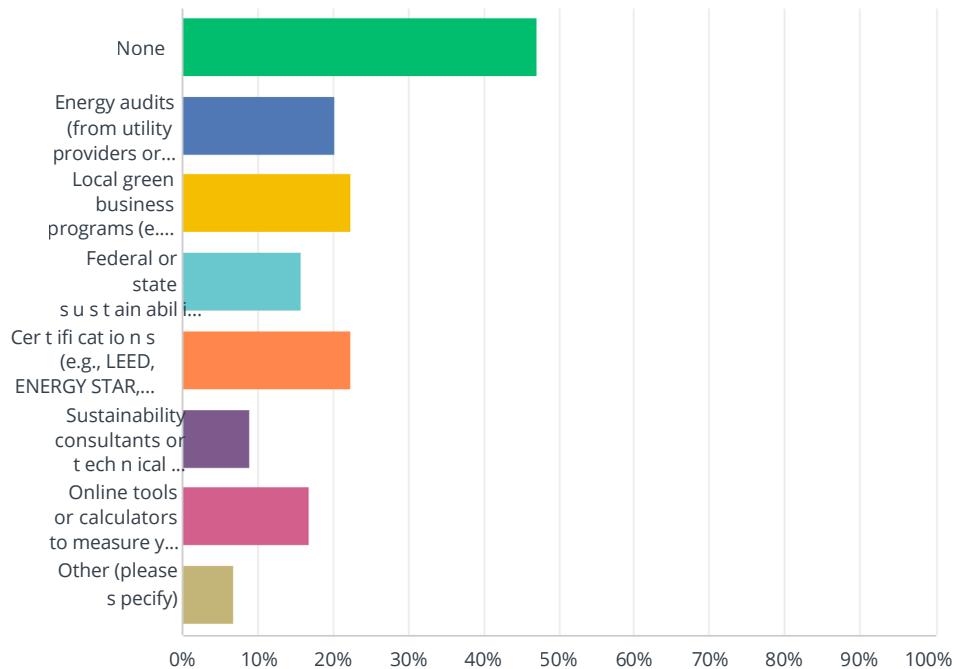
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE	
1	We make a sustainability product	2:08 PM	71% 9/30/2025
2	We are a cleantech startup with a focus on carbon reduction through our technology platforms. We are too small to incorporate sustainability practices as part of our general operations right now as we are just trying to stay alive and get to scale.	9/30/2025 8:10 AM	
3	We mainly invest in and support sustainable startups and technologies	9/29/2025 9:38 AM	
4	Food security, education, affordable & efficient housing dev	9/24/2025 8:36 AM	

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5	Work from home, conducting most meeting virtually.	9/22/2025 2:46 PM
6	environmental sustainability is part of our mission & vision	9/22/2025 2:00 PM
7	paperless processes whenever possible. (HR, Operations)	9/22/2025 1:14 PM
8	using energy efficient thermostat and installing sun blocking shades	9/15/2025 12:08 PM
9	Minimize plastic usage	9/11/2025 4:50 PM
10	Most Documents are digital so we use less paper than most office buildings.	9/11/2025 3:16 PM
11	I support local businesses	9/11/2025 1:26 PM
12	Water refill station	9/11/2025 1:03 PM
13	I don't buy into the woke propaganda. Please don't make Sparks about political ideals	9/11/2025 12:14 PM
14	We are Hope Ignites Phoenix an education program	9/11/2025 11:16 AM
15	tech trade in program	9/11/2025 10:59 AM
16	Teach recycle art classes and provide recycle exhibits	9/11/2025 10:41 AM
17	hiring of down syndrome workers	9/10/2025 1:19 PM
18	We keep overhead lights off most of the day.	9/10/2025 11:52 AM
19	N/A	9/10/2025 11:33 AM
20	Solar panels generate nearly half our energy needs	9/10/2025 11:16 AM
21	solar panels on the roof	9/10/2025 11:12 AM
22	We work from home and are a paperless office, we also volunteer	9/10/2025 11:11 AM
23	We are an E-waste recycling company diverting all E-waste from landfills	9/9/2025 1:11 PM

Q4 What sustainability-related tools, services, or programs (if any) has your organization already used or explored? (select all that apply)

Answered: 89 Skipped: 38



ANSWER CHOICES		RESPONSES	
None		47.19%	42
Energy audits (from utility providers or consultants)		20.22%	18
Local green business programs (e.g., Phoenix Green Business Leaders)		22.47%	20
Federal or state sustainability grants or incentives		15.73%	14
Certifications (e.g., LEED, ENERGY STAR, Green Business Certification)		22.47%	20
Sustainability consultants or technical assistance providers		8.99%	8
Online tools or calculators to measure your environmental impact (e.g., carbon footprint estimators)		16.85%	15
Other (please specify)		6.74%	6
Total Respondents: 89			

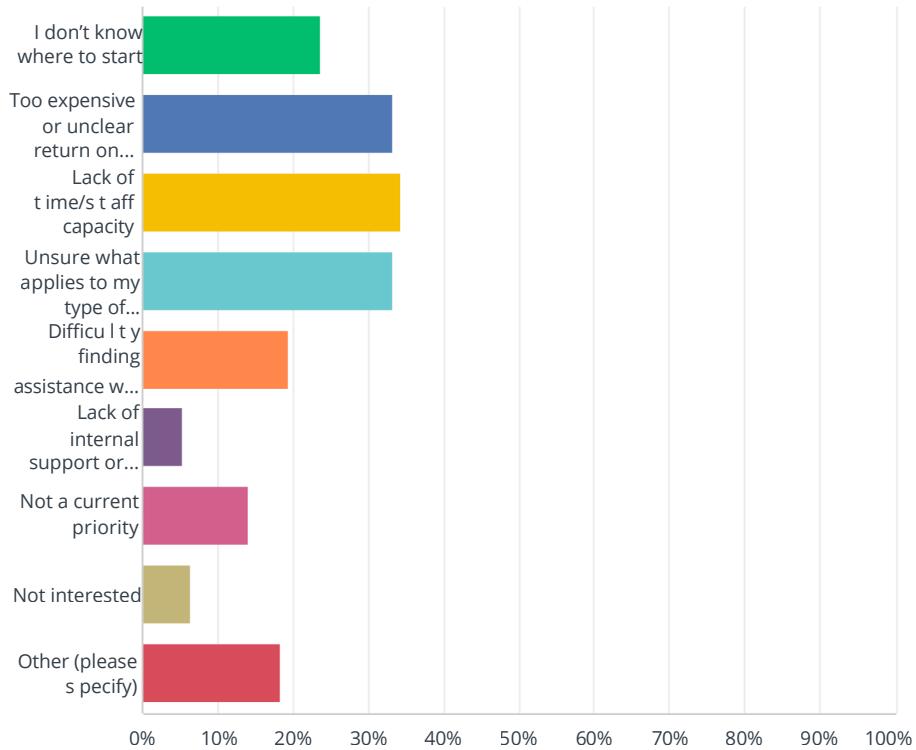
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE	9/29/2025
1	We mainly invest in and support sustainable startups and technologies		9:38 AM
2	Drive a hybrid vehicle		9/23/2025 2:40 PM
3	We used to be a B corp but then they pissed us off and we stopped		9/22/2025 3:14 PM

Sustainable Practices Readiness Survey

4	Our non-profit is housed in ASU facilities and can take advantage of ASU's forward-thinking on s us t ainabiit y	9/17/2025 3:47 PM
5	See above	9/11/2025 12:14 PM
6	we recycle cardboard and other paper	9/10/2025 11:52 AM

Q5 What are the biggest challenges or barriers to using any new potential sustainability tools for your organization? (select up to 3)

Answered: 93 Skipped: 34



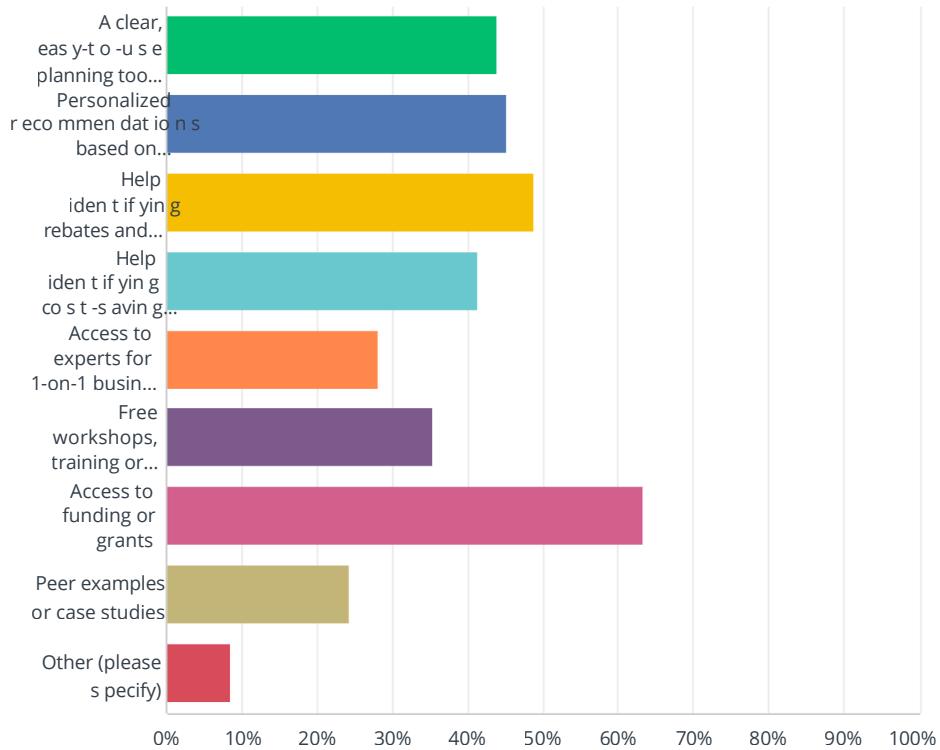
ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
I don't know where to start	23.66% 22
Too expensive or unclear return on investment potential	33.33% 31
Lack of time/staff capacity	34.41% 32
Unsure what applies to my type of organization	33.33% 31
Difficulty finding assistance with applying for rebates, programs, incentives, etc.	19.35% 18
Lack of internal support or buy-in	5.38% 5
Not a current priority	13.98% 13
Not interested	6.45% 6
Other (please specify)	18.28% 17
Total Respondents: 93	
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
	DATE

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1	Don't have a physical office as a startup we are focused on the day to day challenges while operating in a temporary space that we don't want to invest in since we may move soon	10/3/2025 6:41 AM
2		9/29/2025 10:33 AM
3	Decision Making	9/25/2025 11:48 AM
4	Programs unavailable, plastic packaging recycling for example	9/23/2025 6:36 PM
5	We don't own our buildings	9/23/2025 12:02 PM
6	I want to xeriscape but it feels overwhelming and the last time I tried working with a landscape architect they drew up a plan that was twice my budget and the whole effort was wasted unclear return for a very small nonprofit	9/22/2025 3:14 PM
7	We don't own our building and work in a shared office space.	9/22/2025 2:46 PM
8	I rent my space, do not own the building	9/22/2025 1:14 PM
9	A lot do not make fiscal or logical sense	9/22/2025 1:07 PM
10	The rent is too high and we are not making any money. We are planning to close.	9/16/2025 5:32 PM
11	N/A	9/14/2025 4:05 PM
12	very small operation so minimal effect to justify most changes	9/11/2025 7:24 PM
13	We rent a small office in a larger building so anything related to our office space is largely out of our control.	9/11/2025 10:59 AM
14	we are a small NPO with limited resources.	9/10/2025 12:41 PM
15	N/A	9/10/2025 11:52 AM
16	lack of support/creative thinking from city, county and state governments	9/10/2025 11:33 AM
17		9/9/2025 1:08 PM

Q6 What kind of support would make it easier for your organization to implement sustainable practices? (select all that apply)

Answered: 82 Skipped: 45



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES
A clear, easy-to-use planning tool or online resource to be referenced at our convenience	43.90% 36
Personalized recommendations based on location and/or type of business	45.12% 37
Help identifying rebates and financial incentives	48.78% 40
Help identifying cost-saving opportunities	41.46% 34
Access to experts for 1-on-1 business support, or technical assistance	28.05% 23
Free workshops, training or webinars	35.37% 29
Access to funding or grants	63.41% 52
Peer examples or case studies	24.39% 20
Other (please specify)	8.54% 7
Total Respondents: 82	
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)
	DATE

Sustainable Practices Readiness Survey

1	Not sure we need it	9/22/2025 1:19 PM
2	I do not own the building, rent my space.	9/22/2025 1:08 PM
3	The best way to reduce costs is to reduce rent. Now is the Internet age, and physical stores cannot make money if the rent costs are too high.	9/14/2025 4:08 PM
4	option to work out of your own home	9/11/2025 6:20 PM
5	Highly disappointed that you are focusing on environmental politics rather than what small businesses actually need	9/11/2025 12:16 PM
6	we do not own the building, so we are limited on sustainable options	9/10/2025 11:55 AM
7	help from government by implementing creative sustainability ideas and programs	9/9/2025 1:14 PM

Q7 What features would make a cost-saving sustainability planning tool most useful to your organization?

Answered: 68 Skipped: 59

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	All the information needed to implement.	9/30/2025 3:52 PM
2	One that was actionable and provided enough information to make purchasing decisions or allow for implementation.	9/30/2025 8:12 AM
3	Ones that apply to businesses occupying a space temporarily	9/29/2025 10:34 AM
4	Clear identification of ROI and when to expect payback for any upfront investment	9/29/2025 9:56 AM
5	N/A	9/25/2025 11:48 AM
6	Showcasing the cost difference between conventional and sustainable action. ROI	9/25/2025 8:12 AM
7	Being able to refer people to it, I do a ton of networking, so having a sustainability solution for small businesses would be fantastic.	9/24/2025 10:31 AM
8	Foundational Data Integration and Accuracy Core Analytical and Modeling Action-Oriented and Reporting Features and Usability and Collaboration	9/24/2025 9:01 AM
	Real attainable options that does not cost thousands of dollars right from the start.	
9	what is the value (in terms of energy, resource use, conservation policy) of doing what we are doing.	9/24/2025 8:26 AM
10	very simple to use and no input, would need support for data input. SMBs are not going to input their data.	9/24/2025 7:24 AM
11	Easy to use	9/23/2025 4:11 PM
12	Must be applicable to an organization that does not own its building.	9/23/2025 2:43 PM
13	Understanding what is available to my business and how to implement them	9/23/2025 12:04 PM
14	I would love technical assistance to get rid of our grass and xericape	9/23/2025 9:53 AM
15	As a single employee for a very small nonprofit having a self assessment planning tool would be helpful and potential "lunch & learn" virtual workshops with others to ask questions, brainstorm ideas or share best practices.	9/22/2025 3:15 PM
16	quick and easily accessible methods of data input and fast, clear results directly applicable to our needs.	9/22/2025 2:51 PM
17	Finding ways to fund the implementation of sustainable efforts.	9/22/2025 2:03 PM
	uns ure	
18	How to upgrade your company van to hybrid or 100% electric? Companies that use recycled	9/22/2025 1:58 PM
19	materials. Banks Creditcards, that have an emphasis on sustainability and volunteerism.	9/22/2025 1:23 PM
20	No idea	9/22/2025 1:20 PM
	recycling for the tenants	
21	Identifying different categories from which to choose	9/22/2025 1:19 PM
22	Online access	9/22/2025 1:08 PM
23	N/a	9/17/2025 3:53 PM
24	None at this point	9/17/2025 3:42 PM
25		9/16/2025 7:40 PM
26		9/16/2025 5:33 PM

Sustainable Practices Readiness Survey

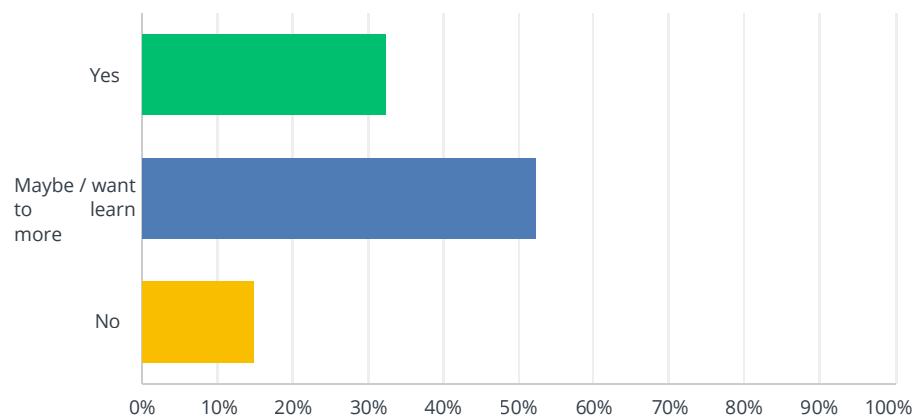
27	A direct link to current grant opportunities supporting sustainability projects.	9/15/2025 4:44 PM
28	Access to up front capital is more important to us. Financing or lease to own models.	9/15/2025 4:24 PM
29	Personalization. Tools are great, but not helpful if they only apply to businesses bigger or making more money than you. We can all do our part.	9/15/2025 1:50 PM
30	Unsure	9/15/2025 1:44 PM
31	Was to reduce electric costs. We don't use many materials or water.	9/15/2025 12:09 PM
32	n/a	9/15/2025 10:56 AM
33	- A table with expected upfront cost vs long term savings. - A place where we could do our own mini "audit" in order to see what sustainability projects are available to us. - Mobile friendly so you could use it while walking around, checking out a facility, etc.	9/14/2025 8:47 AM
34	What we can recycle or repurpose and where to send it. We would love a program to be able to possibly donate food that is not consumed that we have to discard that is perfectly good. I don't know	9/13/2025 7:42 PM
35	User friendly content for training.	9/12/2025 7:07 AM
36	Items that can be recycled.	9/12/2025 6:36 AM
37	Marketing	9/11/2025 10:41 PM
38	I am not sure.	9/11/2025 10:37 PM
39	Suggestions on how to work sustainable practices into everyday systems	9/11/2025 8:37 PM
40	being able to operate my services out of my house. It's absolutely ridiculous that I can't. I am a hair stylist and I should be able to work out of my own house to save me tons of thousands of dollars each year.	9/11/2025 6:33 PM
	Customized results specific to business situation	
42	not sure	9/11/2025 4:51 PM
43	Easy to use	9/11/2025 3:17 PM
44	Tools that are tailored to our organization that reduce the need for searching.	9/11/2025 1:05 PM
45	None	9/11/2025 1:03 PM
46	Easy to understand and use, intuitive. A/B questions to direct towards home run business. We are not a brick and mortar business but produce items to sell to public.	9/11/2025 12:47 PM
47	NA	9/11/2025 12:42 PM
48	Having the ability to track ingredient usage and energy consumption in small-batch production. Since I work from home, I need a tool that helps me identify where I can reduce waste in	9/11/2025 12:16 PM
49	packaging, manage ingredient costs efficiently, and optimize baking schedules to save on utilities. A feature that breaks down cost-saving opportunities specific to small-scale, home-based food operations, like bulk purchasing analysis, eco-friendly packaging options, and energy-efficient baking practices, would make the tool especially valuable.	9/11/2025 11:52 AM
	At this point we are in a building that is being sold.	
	cupons/discounts. possibly sourcing from local providers.	
50	Not sure	9/11/2025 11:18 AM
51	solar energy, water consumption gage and reduction of costs	9/11/2025 11:00 AM
52	Results driven	9/11/2025 10:46 AM
53	A clear step by step process for my type of business	9/11/2025 10:44 AM
54	Comparing options	9/11/2025 10:38 AM
55	Customization or relevancy	9/11/2025 10:31 AM
56		9/10/2025 10:13 PM
57		9/10/2025 3:15 PM

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58	maintenance, and lasting compacity of cost saving sustainable equipment	9/10/2025 1:21 PM
59	Flexibility of use, since my time is limited. Well researched, so I can rely on the data. Free!	9/10/2025 1:02 PM
60	Examples from other organizations of our size and type. We have limited physical assets and are mostly a knowledge-based organization.	9/10/2025 12:42 PM
61	save money, time and resources	9/10/2025 11:55 AM
62	Ideas but we have a shared office building so we would be limited in what we could do in that area	9/10/2025 11:19 AM
	I don't know, this concept is new to me.	
63	We are good, really. Low electric bill, etc.	9/10/2025 11:17 AM
64	roi calculator	9/10/2025 11:13 AM
65	An app would be ideal	9/9/2025 2:41 PM
66	Have it online training	9/9/2025 2:38 PM
67	A system that A) Promotes using orgs like Treasures 4 Teachers or Stardust Building Supplies	9/9/2025 1:18 PM
68	B) Connect business with extra materials that might be useful for other businesses (instead of throwing in landfill). For example, my employer has lot of barely used bubblewrap and foam we throw int he trash every day. if the government, or someone, woudl connect use with a business that could use it, they could take it for free on a regular basis. That would save them money and help the environment.	9/9/2025 1:14 PM

Q8 Would you be interested in testing or giving feedback on a new cost-savings focused sustainability planning tool designed specifically for Arizona businesses?

Answered: 80 Skipped: 47



ANSWER CHOICES	RESPONSES	
Yes	32.50%	26
Maybe / want to learn more	52.50%	42
No	15.00%	12
TOTAL		80

Q9 Anything else you'd like us to know about your needs, experiences, or goals around sustainability?

Answered: 39 Skipped: 88

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I think any tools need to be developed with the different locations around AZ	9/30/2025 3:52 PM
2	Our energy consumption is a core focus for sustainability. Finding ways to buy renewable credits as a small business owner would be very helpful.	9/30/2025 8:12 AM
3	nope	9/29/2025 10:34 AM
4	A key insight we've received from many startups and corporates is the need for a testbed or testing facility to try out new innovations to validate their cost-savings before fully implementing them commercially.	9/29/2025 9:56 AM
5	Nope	9/24/2025 10:31 AM
6	But in order to that, we need grant funding. Think about sustainability goals:Comprehensive and Context-Aware Information.Lifecycle Analysis Understanding and Regulatory and Certification Navigation	9/24/2025 9:01 AM
7	low effort and cost savings are most important	9/23/2025 4:11 PM
8	Case studies of how other AZ small businesses would be helpful	9/23/2025 2:43 PM
9	Access to grants to fund the upgrades is the only way nonprofits will be able to afford to part i c i pat e.	9/23/2025 12:04 PM
10	As nonprofits or local business get approved through the Arizona Corporation Commission, having helpful links be sent out as annual forms are due or have a resource area embedded with the AZ Corp. Commission site to reference would be both valuable and helpful	9/22/2025 2:51 PM
11	We are dedicated to sustainable practices and focus on education and training for our clients on these issues. More funding and support for our work is needed.	9/22/2025 2:03 PM
12	We would love to have covered parking that doubles as solar but absolutely do not have the funds to accomplish that on our own.	9/22/2025 1:58 PM
13	No	
14	not at this time	9/22/2025 1:19 PM
15	Our non-profit is very mindful of keeping sustainability as a practice. I hope your efforts can raise the awareness for others. Thank you!	9/22/2025 1:08 PM
16	NA	9/17/2025 3:53 PM
17	N/a	
18	It is a number one priority, yet rarely gets the time it deserves.	9/17/2025 3:42 PM
19	My organization has 5 locations, not all in the same city (Tempe, Scottsdale, Gilbert, and 2 in Phoenix). It would be nice to have a better platform for organizations with multiple locations, to be able to certify the same way across multiple cities.	9/16/2025 7:40 PM
20	not at this time	9/15/2025 1:44 PM
21	Visibility of my business	9/14/2025 8:47 AM
22	No	9/13/2025 7:42 PM
23	No.	9/11/2025 10:37 PM
24	please build housing that is also zoned for commercial. Right now we're just making the rich	9/11/2025 8:37 PM
		9/11/2025 6:33 PM
		9/11/2025 6:20 PM

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richer by forcing us to have to rent a space and pay overhead when it could be very simple and save my family so much much money		
25	no	9/11/2025 3:17 PM
26	How to harvest rainwater, a "true" solar assessment, design experts when we remove lawn or fence out animals.	9/11/2025 1:05 PM
27	I worked for a certified sustainable business and am familiar with the concept, but as a small in home business owner I'm not sure what can apply to me.	9/11/2025 12:42 PM
28	No	
29	I have been clear on how most small businesses feel about a government entity pushing agendas	9/11/2025 12:16 PM
30	No	9/11/2025 12:16 PM
31	Not at this time	9/11/2025 11:52 AM
32	The City of Surprise owns our building so we are limited in what we can request	9/11/2025 10:46 AM
33	Thank you!	9/11/2025 10:44 AM
34	Thanks for helping	9/10/2025 10:13 PM
35	No	9/10/2025 1:02 PM
36	not at this time	9/10/2025 11:55 AM
37	None.	9/10/2025 11:19 AM
38	No	9/10/2025 11:17 AM
39	Please contact me. I would like to discuss further. Phil Cacioppo , Value Stream Specialist at BAE Systems in Phoenix, AZ PHIL.CACIOPPO@BAE SYSTEMS.US 602-643-7481	9/10/2025 11:13 AM
		9/9/2025 1:14 PM

D. Branding Overview

This research represents the first phase of a larger initiative. The insights gathered through this study provide a strong strategic foundation for guiding sustainability efforts within Arizona's economic landscape. The findings revealed both a critical resource gap and a need for a clear, accessible identity to unify and communicate this work effectively.

Building on these insights, the next phase of the project—to be undertaken following this white paper—will focus on developing a comprehensive brand and platform to support continued progress and future fundraising efforts. This brand will embody the collaborative and practical approach identified as essential to advancing sustainability across Arizona's small organizations.

Guided by feedback emphasizing the importance of plain, accessible language, the emerging brand concept, Arizona Sustainability Navigator, has been selected to clearly convey the purpose of the resource. The Arizona Sustainability Navigator is envisioned as a one-stop, statewide resource to help small businesses, nonprofits, and community organizations access the tools, guidance, and connections needed to pursue sustainability in an economically achievable and practical way.

Several logos have been developed for the brand and are provided for review and consideration.

Option A:



Option B:



12. Sources

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