

Miller Center Sustainability Plan

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The Miller Center is a nonpartisan affiliate of the University of Virginia that specializes in presidential scholarship, public policy, and political history, *providing critical insights for the nation's governance challenges*.

One of the great challenges facing us in the 21st century is Sustainability: both environmental stewardship and broader social and economic issues. As part of its mission, the Center regularly examines and speaks to these issues. Sustainability, however, is far more than a scholarly exercise for the Miller Center. With this document, the Center signals its intention to become a leader at the University, not only in examining issues of Sustainability, but also in applying best practices to ensure that the Center's physical and human assets are sustained and nourished.

In response to the University's [Strategic Plan \(Great and Good\)](#) and the [University Sustainability Plan 2020-2030](#), the Miller Center has developed this unit level Strategic Plan in an effort to explicate the Miller Center's role in environmental stewardship and broader social and economic sustainability issues.

In 2021 the Miller Center formed a Sustainability Committee to study issues related to sustainability as they relate to the Miller Center and to draft a unit level Strategic Plan on Sustainability. The Miller Center's plan is a living one that will grow and develop over time. While the Sustainability Committee embraces the concept of strategic planning (as evidenced by this report), we prioritize action and results. As such, the committee will take sustainability action when and where it can. Following this approach, we will address some areas in this plan (the low hanging fruit) quickly; our efforts on other areas that require more thought or study will evolve over time. This report serves as a snapshot of where the Miller Center is regarding sustainability currently and includes goals that have been achieved, goals that are actively being addressed, and aspirational goals that are under consideration.

This plan is divided into seven areas that align with the University's ten 2030 sustainability goals. Those ten goals are:

1. Become **FOSSIL FUEL FREE** by 2050.
2. Reduce **NITROGEN** levels 30% below 2010 levels.
3. Reduce **WATER** consumption to 30% below 2010 levels.
4. Reduce **WASTE** production to 70% of 2010 levels.
5. Increase sustainable **FOOD** purchases to 30% of annual total.
6. Enhance sustainability-focused **TEACHING**, curricular development, and experiential learning.
7. Enhance sustainability-focused **RESEARCH** and UVA's reputation as a locus of sustainability.
8. Foster collaborations that enable mutually beneficial community- and **GROUND-ENGAGED LEARNING**.
9. Partner with our community to accelerate collaborative initiatives to advance sustainable, healthy, and **EQUITABLE PLACES** for all.
10. Build **ACCOUNTABILITY** for sustainability goal achievement at every level of the University.

In the sections that follow, we will explore each of the seven areas of focus and detail:

- Our research
- Our resulting strategy
- Concrete goals
- Aspirational goals

Fossil Fuel and Water (aligns with 1. FOSSIL FUEL and 3. WATER)

University Goals:

- Reduce **FOSSIL FUEL** to 15% of 2019 numbers (electricity and natural gas).
- Reduce **WATER** consumption to 30% below 2010 levels.

Research and Findings:

Facilities Management has provided us with historic utility data that allows us a window into our energy and water use.

This data indicates that our HVAC system (cooling and heat) represents the biggest consumer of both fossil fuels and water. Every year electricity and water usage increases starting in late May, plateaus in July and August, and then declines to a baseline by October. Natural gas usage starts increasing in October, peaks in January and, declines to baseline by April. Clearly the spike in electricity and water usage is tied to air conditioning and the spike in natural gas is tied to heating the Center in the winter.

Strategy:

The committee determined that increasing the efficiency of the building's HVAC system represented the greatest opportunity for decrease in fossil fuel and water usage and should be prioritized. The committee also identified several lower priority goals to address.

Concrete Goals:

- *Replace HVAC system:*
The Miller Center's HVAC system is due to be replaced in 2022 and 2023. This project is the responsibility of Facilities Management. Both the chiller plant and the air handlers will be replaced in this time. Office of Sustainability staff have advised on the replacement plan. This new system should result in significant savings on fossil fuel and water.
- *Improve building envelope:*
The Office of Sustainability has determined that the Miller Center does not have any insulation in the attic of the historic Faulkner House. This is a stunning revelation considering the University has owned and been responsible for the upkeep of Faulkner House since the late 1970s. The failure to address this and other issues like leaking windows has cost the University an untold amount of money and wasted and an untold amount of energy. Facilities Management is aware of both the insulation and window issues, and we hope they will respond to them in a timely manner. **Of the goals that are currently actionable, the Committee believes addressing the insulation and leaking window issues should be the highest priority.** Collaboration with the Office for the Architect may be necessary as the Faulkner House is on the Historic Registry.
- *Transition to LED lighting:*
Thanks to the work of the Office of Sustainability, the bulk of this goal has been completed. All "can" light fixtures and fluorescent ceiling light fixtures have been converted to LED fixtures.

- *Reduce heating/cooling in infrequently used spaces:*
The Miller Center regularly heats and conditions spaces that are not consistently occupied, representing a significant energy reduction possibility. The Office of Sustainability is currently working with Miller Center staff to identify areas of the building that can have reduced heating and cooling during specific times of the day/week. We are also investigating heating and cooling on demand (e.g., activating heating and cooling systems only when a space is occupied).
- *Eliminate desktop computers in favor of laptop computers:*
While we recognize that moving from desktop computers to laptop computers represents a relatively small benefit from a sustainability standpoint, we are committed to making progress where we can. Starting in 2022, we will no longer purchase desktop computers unless a user has a specific need that necessitates a desktop. As computers reach their natural life cycle, they will be replaced with laptop computers.
- *Allow for hybrid work schedules:*
During the pandemic, Miller Center faculty and staff learned how to function efficiently from home offices. Recognizing that with the pandemic we entered a new normal, Miller Center leadership has committed to more flexible work schedules that allow some staff the opportunity to work from home on a semi-regular basis. Not only does this policy help provide our workforce with a better life/work balance, but with proper building scheduling it also helps reduce the Miller Center's energy use. Fewer people regularly in the building will reduce energy and water use. Working remotely also helps reduce fuel use related to commuting.

Aspirational Goals/Goals Under Consideration:

- *Fossil Fuel Free Building 2040:*
Current University goals are to become fossil fuel free by 2050. We would like to set an aggressive **aspirational** goal to meet that fossil fuel free metric by 2040.
- *Electric Vehicle Chargers:*
Electric cars continue to gain a larger share of the vehicle market. The Committee will keep an eye on this trend and initiate a conversation with the University Parking and Transportation office. As costs for cars and their corresponding charging stations fall, the Committee will consider the feasibility of installing charging stations at the Center.
- *Eliminate desktop printers:*
Once the building is again regularly occupied, we will evaluate the feasibility of this goal.
- *Eliminate mini refrigerators and space heaters:*
We recognize the inherent inefficiency of space heaters (and their prohibition at UVA). However, for well over a decade we have asked Facilities Management to address the leaking windows in the various parts of the building to no avail. During the winter months it is difficult to ask staff to remove space heaters while cold air is entering offices by poorly sealed windows.

Nitrogen and Food (aligns with 2. NITROGEN and 5. FOOD)

University Goals:

- Reduce **NITROGEN** levels 30% below 2010 levels
- Increase sustainable **FOOD** purchases to 30% of annual total.

Research and Findings:

Reid Forbes, the Center's events manager, is a member of the Sustainability Committee. Reid has provided us with historic data on food purchases for Miller Center events.

Facilities Management data suggests that the Miller Center's *direct* nitrogen production is negligible. Further research indicates that the Center's *indirect* nitrogen production likely comes from one of two places: 1) fertilizer runoff related to farming and 2) fuel related to shipping (trucking and air travel).

Strategy:

The Sustainability Committee determined that focusing our attention on the Miller Center's food purchases would represent the most significant option for decreasing our nitrogen footprint. Further research is required to determine how the Center might reduce its nitrogen impact from shipping.

Concrete Goals:

- *Begin a conversation on beef and pork:*
Beef production is by far the most significant producer of nitrogen within the food production space. Pork production, while not as impactful as beef, also produces significant levels of nitrogen. The Miller Center is committed to engaging its staff, faculty and leadership in a conversation about the practicality of limiting its food offerings to sustainable sources.
- *Ensure that any seafood served is sustainable:*
Replacing beef on our menus with seafood would address nitrogen impact, but it *could* introduce new sustainability issues. The Miller Center will ensure that all seafood on event menus is sustainably sourced.
- *Reduce food waste:*
Reducing food waste is a priority for the Miller Center for both sustainability and financial reasons. Staff involved in event planning will take the University's "Zero Waste Training" to learn tactics to reduce food waste and will then implement those tactics to align the Miller Center with the University's reduction goals.

Aspirational Goals/Goals Under Consideration:

- *Consult with the Office of Sustainability and Nitrogen Working Group to come up with strategies for reducing our shipping related nitrogen footprint:*
It is unclear whether shipping related to Miller Center purchases has a meaningful impact on the Miller Center's nitrogen footprint. More research in this area is required.

Waste (aligns with 4. WASTE)

University Goals:

1. Reduce **WASTE** production to 70% of 2010 levels.

Research and Findings:

Facilities Management has provided us with historic waste removal data that provides us a baseline for our waste production. This data is in raw poundage and quite straight forward to interpret.

Strategy:

The committee determined that the most efficient means of reducing the Center's waste footprint would be to focus on increasing recycling and composting while reducing or eliminating non-sustainable products. Success will be determined by the relative size of our dumpster.

Concrete Goals:

- *UVA recycling system:*
The Miller Center adopted the University's recycling plan in 2021. This plan replaces all individual trash cans with recycling and waste stations strategically placed about the building. The system encourages staff to think more carefully about the waste they produce.
- *Composting:*
While recycling paper, plastics, and aluminum will reduce our waste footprint, our research shows that to meet the aggressive goals set by the University, composting must be a significant part of our sustainability solution.
- *Eliminate single use plastics:*
In 2021, the Miller Center committed itself to the regulations outlined in Executive Order 77. Despite EO77 being replaced by EO17, the Miller Center will remain committed to EO77's goal to eliminate use of all single use plastics. Specifically, the Miller Center will no longer purchase water in plastic bottles, we will only use compostable cutlery and dishes, and we will replace our Keurig coffee machine with a compostable option. Filtered water will be made available to staff and guests for use in reusable containers.
- *Train staff on recycling and composting:*
The University's waste reduction goal is significant. The combination, though, of a robust recycling system and composting program should eliminate enough landfill waste to meet the goals, if (and only if) the staff and faculty understand the system and use it properly. Training staff will be key to successfully meeting our waste goals. Along with "Zero Waste Events" training, the Miller Center will undertake composting training and infrastructure evaluation annually. A staff member of the Miller Center will participate in the Sustainable Food Collaborative working group to help build, execute and communicate best practices.

Aspirational Goals/Goals Under Consideration:

- *Reduce printing:*
Once the building is again regularly occupied, we will evaluate the feasibility of this goal.

Community Outreach and Inreach (aligns with 8. GROUNDS-ENGAGED LEARNING and 9. EQUITABLE SPACES above)

University Goals:

- Foster collaborations that enable mutually beneficial community- and **GROUNDS-ENGAGED LEARNING**.
- Partner with our community to accelerate collaborative initiatives to advance sustainable, healthy, and **EQUITABLE PLACES** for all.

Research and Findings:

Beginning in 2018, the Miller Center formed a Workplace Culture Committee (CREEP) to address (among other things) issues of inequity at the Miller Center. This committee has made great progress over the ensuing years to bring a spirit of togetherness and value to all staff and faculty at the Center.

Strategy:

The Sustainability Committee is delighted with the significant progress that the Miller Center has made since 2018 to make the Miller Center an equitable space for our faculty, staff, and visitors. This committee encourages the Miller Center to continue to build on the success of the last number of years.

Concrete Goals:

- *Miller Center Values:*
In 2019 the Miller Center established a set of shared values to which all faculty, staff, and leadership committed. The Miller Center recognizes that to be effective, these values must be nurtured. As such, a permanent subcommittee of CREEP has been formed to adjudicate violations of the shared values and to revisit and revise the values regularly.
- *Descendants of Enslaved People:*
The University has recently approached the Miller Center, asking it to conduct research on the history of enslaved people and their descendants at the Miller Center's historic Faulkner House. The Miller Center recognizes that creating equitable spaces for all requires an examination of both who we are and who we were. Sheila Blackford and Michael Greco are leading this project. Research started in the summer of 2022.
- *Public Events:*
The Miller Center is committed to hosting two public events each year focused on an issue related to sustainability. The Sustainability Committee imagines a spring event each year related to climate change, and a fall event focused on a social aspect of sustainability (e.g., food, housing, voting equity).
- *UVA's Civic Engagement Sub-Committee:*

The University has established a Sustainability Committee with three sub-committees, one of which is the Civic Engagement Sub-Committee. The Miller Center, with its decades of public programming experience, was invited to serve on that sub-committee. The Miller Center happily accepted the invitation and is committed to having a Miller Center representative permanently as a member.

Teaching and Research (aligns with 6. TEACHING and 7. RESEARCH)

University Goals:

1. Enhance sustainability-focused **TEACHING**, curricular development, and experiential learning.
2. Enhance sustainability-focused **RESEARCH** and UVA's reputation as a locus of sustainability.

Research and Findings:

While the Miller Center regularly interacts with students at the University and its faculty regularly teach classes at the University, the Center itself is not formally associated with teaching. Much of the research at the Center focuses on public policy and the presidency. While those research areas could include issues of sustainability, the Sustainability Committee found it difficult to link existing Miller Center teaching and research to specific sustainability related issues. The committee determined that this area may be a relative area of weakness for the Miller Center.

Strategy:

While teaching and research may be a relative area of weakness for the Miller Center in terms of sustainability, the Sustainability Committee did want to explore what might be possible in the future. The committee currently does not have any teaching or research faculty as members. The committee believes that adding a scholar to our committee will give us the expertise to consider this question in the future.

Concrete Goals:

- *Add a scholar to the Sustainability Committee:*
The Sustainability Committee will recruit a member of the Miller Center's teaching and research faculty to join the committee specifically to help the members consider where Miller Center expertise can help inform the University's sustainability teaching and research, such as on climate change policy or health care equity. We will explore potential research collaborations with the Environmental Resilience Institute, School of Medicine and/or School of Nursing.

Outdoor Spaces (aligns with 8. GROUNDS-ENGAGED LEARNING)

University Goals:

- Foster collaborations that enable mutually beneficial community- and **GROUNDS-ENGAGED LEARNING**.

Research and Findings:

Several members of the Sustainability Committee want to explore options related to sustainability and the Miller Center's outdoor spaces. *This section is largely aspirational.*

Strategy:

The committee wants to consider ways the Miller Center could make its grounds more sustainable. As we consider different projects, we will think about how potential projects might have a larger community audience or benefit.

Aspirational Goals/Goals Under Consideration:

- *Community Garden:*
The Sustainability Committee is interested in exploring options for a Community Garden that could be used as a means of teaching about sustainable food production. The Miller Center has significant space in the rear of its property that could be utilized for this purpose. We would like to explore the possibility of having students run this project under supervision of Miller Center volunteers. We are specifically interested in targeting the Faulkner Residence Halls as a source of potential student interest. The committee recognizes that this would be a significant project that would require **careful consideration and commitment** before it could be realized.
- *Beekeeping:*
The state of the world's bee population is worrying. As a way of raising awareness about this issue, the committee is exploring options in coordination with the Office of Sustainability, specifically the "Bee Grounds UVA Working Group" to start a beehive at the Miller Center. The hive could be used as a teaching tool to educate students and community members about the importance of bees to our ecology. The committee recognizes that this would be a significant project that would require **careful consideration and commitment** before it could be realized.
- *Support native species:*
Native species are under threat everywhere. The committee would like to explore options to make the Miller Center grounds a haven for native species. Ideas that are under consideration include: ensuring all plantings on grounds are native, erecting bat houses around the grounds, erecting purple martin houses. The committee imagines that these relatively small projects (e.g., constructing bat houses) could be a teaching opportunity for interested students or community members.

- *Wetland area:*
The Miller Center has a small stream running through the front of the property. The committee would like to consider cleaning up that area and planting some native plants to allow a small native wetland space to grow and prosper.

Accountability (aligns with 10. ACCOUNTABILITY)

University Goals:

- Advance sustainability leadership and impact by incorporating environmental, economic and equity considerations in decision-making, building accountability for sustainability goal achievement at every level of the University.

Research and Findings:

N/A

Strategy:

Accountability requires buy-in from across the Miller Center. The Sustainability Committee will work to develop strategies to engage four distinct stakeholders: Miller Center Leadership, Miller Center Governance, University Leadership, and Faculty and Staff.

Concrete Goals:

- *UVA Sustainability Office approval*
This Sustainability Report was originally requested by the University's Office of Sustainability. The Miller Center believes that a successful implementation of this plan will depend on continued support from that office. As such this plan has been reviewed carefully by the Office of Sustainability, and we have incorporated many of their suggestions.
- *Consultation with leadership*
Once a draft of the Miller Center's Sustainability Plan is completed, it will be sent to the Miller Center's director and leadership team for review and comment.
- *Governing Board approval*
Once the Miller Center's leadership team has approved the draft plan, the Sustainability Committee will present it to the Miller Center's Governing Council for formal ratification.
- *Staff training*
The Miller Center's Sustainability Plan anticipates many changes to the way staff and faculty go about their workdays. For this plan to succeed, it *must* be embraced by the staff and faculty. This committee believes that educating our colleagues on not just *how* the new systems work, but *why* they work is an essential part of achieving Center-wide buy-in.
- *Miller Center Sustainability Committee*
The Miller Center's Sustainability Committee is a permanent sub-committee of the Center's CREEP program. Once this report is formally ratified, part of that committee's responsibility each year will be to report on the Miller Center's progress related to its sustainability goals.