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Introduction

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are more critical today than ever and especially in the United States. They offer a foundation for better responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic and building an inclusive, resilient future where no one is left behind. This resource library is part of a larger project in partnership between the UN Foundation and the Brookings Institutions’ Center for Sustainable Development focused on building American leadership on the SDGs.

The SDG framework is an agenda for action, but the process for getting started and what it means in practical terms to implement the SDGs is often less clear, particularly in the United States. This library is a living collection of key resources, tools, and examples of U.S. implementation from across sectors. It was created to provide U.S. actors a starting point and practical resources to embark on or further develop their own SDG efforts and should not be viewed as comprehensive.

We hope you will find these resources instructive on your path to bringing the SDGs home to your community. We encourage you to check back as the library continues to grow and to share your resources and best practices so others can benefit as well.

If you have additional resources to share, please email Krista Rasmussen at krasmussen@unfoundation.org.
Voluntary Local Reviews

Voluntary Local Reviews (VLRs) are a vehicle for reporting local progress and action toward achieving the SDGs. To date, at least 65 cities and regional governments around the globe have published a VLR, including in the U.S. The process is modeled on and complements the Voluntary National Review (VNR), which UN member states use to present their SDG progress and alignment at the UN during the annual High-Level Political Forum. In some countries, the VNR incorporates findings from subnational assessments. Unlike the VNR, the VLR has no official or universally accepted standards guiding the process. While city and municipal governments have largely led the VLR process, other sectors are starting to adapt this tool to track their own SDG efforts, including universities.

RESOURCES

Voluntary Local Review Declaration
New York City

In 2019 at the UN General Assembly, New York City launched the Voluntary Local Review Declaration for local and regional governments worldwide to formally commit to reporting on the SDGs at the UN. More than 200 local governments have joined the declaration, including Los Angeles and Orlando.
Learn more
Enabling sustainable development at the local level through Voluntary Local Reviews
The Brookings Institution

There is no universally accepted approach for conducting a VLR, which can be both an opportunity for innovation and a roadblock for getting started. Communities often find the process of conducting the review, which connects stakeholders across sectors and offers an avenue for developing a shared vision and long-term plans, as equally or even more valuable than the outcome product. This Brookings report presents a city-specific perspective informed by the experiences and viewpoints of cities that have completed a VLR, and provides guidance for local officials interested in producing a VLR.

Learn more

A comparative analysis of existing Voluntary Local Reviews
UN-Habitat and United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG)

This study provides an overview of methods used across current VLRs, best practices, and recommendations for others looking to start the process.

Learn more

IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

New York City
In 2018, New York City was among the first cities in the world to report directly to the UN on its SDG implementation. New York City’s VLRs are prepared by staff within the Mayor’s Office for International Affairs in partnership with the Mayor’s Office of Operations who together gather and integrate inputs from across the city government for the report. The city’s comprehensive strategic plan, OneNYC 2050, also integrates SDG indicators to measure progress and feeds into their annual VLR.

New York City Voluntary Local Review 2018
New York City Voluntary Local Review 2019
**Hawaii**

In 2020, Hawaii became the first state in the United States to conduct a statewide VLR, which includes an assessment of progress across all four counties. Hawaii Green Growth Local2020 Hub led the effort in collaboration with partners from government, business, and civil society, using a consultative and locally driven process to identify shared priorities and measure what matters locally. The VLR is informed by the Aloha+ Dashboard, an open-data platform measuring Hawaii's progress toward all 17 SDGs.

[Hawaii Voluntary Local Review 2020](#)

**Los Angeles**

Los Angeles conducted its first VLR in 2019, which highlights initiatives in place to address 8 of the 17 SDGs, including two priority goals for the city, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities). The VLR results from a collaboration with local universities to localize the SDGs for the city, including identifying relevant targets and indicators, and mapping activities and policies to the SDGs. It is informed by the city’s SDG Data Reporting Platform, which tracks progress across the SDGs at the indicator level.

[Los Angeles Voluntary Local Review of progress in 2019](#)

**Pittsburgh**

In November 2020, Pittsburg released their first VLR, which was produced through a phased approach that included scaling the SDGs for the local context and mapping the alignment of current city activities with the SDGs. The city organized roundtable discussions with city employees to identify local priorities. The VLR reports on efforts across all 17 SDGs and is designed as a baseline for future comparison as efforts continue.

[Pittsburg and the Sustainable Development Goals: A Voluntary Local Review of progress 2020](#)
Carnegie Mellon University

In 2020, Carnegie Mellon University (CMU) published the first-ever Voluntary University Review (VUR) modeled after the VLR. A team of faculty, staff, and students led the process, which reviewed how CMU’s teaching, research, and practices aligned with the SDGs using desk research, interviews, and community consultations. This approach offers a useful model for other higher education institutions.

Carnegie Mellon University Voluntary University Review 2020
17 Rooms

17 Rooms is an experimental approach to convening and problem-solving for the SDGs developed by the Center for Sustainable Development at the Brookings Institution in partnership with The Rockefeller Foundation. In practical terms, 17 Rooms participants meet in “Rooms,” or working groups, to identify cooperative actions they can take over the next 12-18 months to make progress on an aspect of an SDG. Emerging ideas are shared between rooms to spot opportunities for collaboration. The process generates a mix of expert-driven insights plus momentum for practical action.

The 17 Rooms initiative has evolved on two tracks: an annual global flagship process focused on international scale policy challenges, and a widely accessible methodology for bottom-up SDG problem-solving at a grass roots level (dubbed “17 Rooms-X”). The 17 Rooms Secretariat recently launched a “17 Rooms-X Community of Practice” with dozens of organizations, including universities, cities, and civil society organizations, joining to share insights on how 17 Rooms can help tackle local economic, social, and environmental issues.

IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

17 Rooms Annual Flagship Event
On the sidelines of the 2018 UN General Assembly, the Brookings Institution and the Rockefeller Foundation launched the 17 Rooms initiative to channel collaborative energy and ideas into practical steps toward reaching the SDGs. The event has turned into an annual event, which in 2020, was adapted into virtual convenings with a focus on
actions toward building back better from the COVID-19 pandemic through the SDG framework.

**Great transitions: Doubling down on the Sustainable Development Goals**

**17 Rooms-U: Georgia Tech**

Universities have led the way in piloting their own “17 Rooms-U” efforts around the country, such as the “17 Zooms” event held at Georgia Tech in 2020. Each room included a mix of faculty, staff, and students who identified ideas for advancing their corresponding SDG at Georgia Tech. These were compiled into a report of 56 key takeaways. The report includes a description of each recommended action, connections to the university's strategic plan, and an estimate of required resources.

[Georgia Tech 17 Rooms – Recommended actions](#)
Data Dashboards

Interactive trackers and dashboards bring the SDGs to life by allowing individuals to visualize data and access measurements of progress, often in real time. These tools encourage citizen engagement in their community’s work on sustainable development while also providing means for accountability. The data can also help to drive decision making and identify gaps and areas of need. Interactive dashboards are increasingly incorporating narrative storytelling alongside quantitative metrics. They also can layer disaggregated data that captures characteristics like gender, race, and age, as well as geographic and location specific data to add further insights.

RESOURCES

Open SDG
Open SDG is an open source platform for communities of all sizes to gather, disseminate, and track data related to the SDGs. It is the result of a collaboration between the UK Office for National Statistics, the U.S. government, the nonprofit Center for Open Data Enterprise, and members of the Open SDG community. It is built exclusively with open-source libraries and tools, and can be hosted and maintained using free services.

Learn more
IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

**Aloha+ Dashboard and Aloha+ Goals Scorecard**
The Aloha+ Dashboard tracks Hawaii’s progress across the SDGs and is organized into six priority areas using community-driven metrics. The metrics were co-developed through a four-year stakeholder engagement process facilitated by Hawaii Green Growth. The dashboard tracks over 280 indicators using both narrative descriptions and quantitative trends to inform statewide and county-level decision making. Community working groups continue to update the data, identify new metrics, and establish priorities based on trends revealed by the dashboard.

[Link to Aloha+ Challenge Dashboard]

**SDG Funders and SDG Indicator Wizard**
Candid

SDG Funders is the most comprehensive dataset on how philanthropic investments align with the SDGs. The dashboard displays funding by goal, region, country, and population group, including over $170 billion from U.S. funders since 2016. The accompanying Indicator Wizard identifies which SDG targets and indicators are related to an organization’s strategic priorities, objectives, and mission statements.

[Link to SDG Funders]

**Los Angeles SDG Activities Index**
The SDG Activities Index is an open source, online encyclopedia of people and organizations doing work to advance the SDGs in Los Angeles. Users can filter projects and organizations by their alignment with individual SDGs to learn about ongoing work and opportunities for collaboration. The dashboard was developed with the Center for Open Data Enterprise.

[Link to LA's SDG Activities Index]
Localizing the Goals and Measuring Progress

The ability to track performance and target resources effectively is the backbone of the SDGs. While the SDGs are a global framework driven by local action, oftentimes indicators and other tools to measure progress do not squarely translate to communities’ local realities and priorities. As a result, localizing the SDGs has evolved from directly implementing SDG national targets and indicators to adapting and modifying the targets and indicators to fit the local context and setting. Communities, businesses, foundations, and universities are developing methods to localize the SDG framework to best measure their progress on the SDGs.

RESOURCES

The Local Data Action Solutions Initiative
Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN)

SDSN’s Local Data Action Solutions Initiative aims to identify and promote replicable methods for sub-national SDG monitoring that facilitate local action. It includes a library of case studies on how to monitor and implement the SDGs at the city and regional level.
Learn more

Hacking the SDGs – Can U.S. cities measure up?
Urban Institute

The majority of SDG targets are relevant to U.S. cities and data is generally available to track progress locally, although gaps exist. This report provides recommendations to help fill the data gaps and create conditions for better use of data to drive local progress on the SDGs.
Learn more
Leading the charge on the SDGs: Best practices for CEOs & corporate leaders
Verizon and Devex

Effectively harnessing the power of business leaders for the SDG agenda is instrumental in meeting the targets by 2030. This report outlines practical steps corporate leaders can take to align their companies with the SDGs and accelerate their sustainability and social impact commitments while maintaining profitability.

Learn more

Classifying SDG Trajectories: A country-level methodology for identifying which issues and people are getting left behind
UN Foundation and the Brookings Institution

This report offers a harmonized methodology for quantifying and measuring progress on the SDGs, with a special emphasis on the goal of leaving no one behind. It includes a framework for comparing indicator trajectories across issue areas to identify gaps and areas for prioritization. It also includes a method for estimating the human consequences of falling short on targets. This methodology can be applied to countries, states, and cities at different stages of development.

Learn more

IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

Accelerating education for the SDGs in universities: case studies
SDSN

Universities in the United States and around the world are finding creative ways to embed the SDGs in their courses, research, and community activities. This collection of case studies offers tangible examples of how universities are advancing the SDGs with a particular
focus on how they are helping learners develop the skillset to solve complex challenges at the heart of the SDGs.

Education for SDGs

Localizing targets and indicators in Los Angeles
To support implementation of the SDGs, the City of Los Angeles worked with four universities to localize the framework for their city’s context. They developed a methodology for assessing the applicability of SDG targets for their community and offered revisions that preserved the target’s original intent. They also explored ways to add local context and priorities, for example adding new indicators to understand disparities faced by LGBTQ+. This process led to the targets and indicators used in the Los Angeles Data Reporting Platform and Voluntary Local Review.

Why localization matters: Implementing the SDGs in Los Angeles
Los Angeles SDG Data Reporting Platform
Leaving No One Behind

The central ambition of the SDGs is to leave no one behind. This rallying cry is especially critical in the United States today for responding to and recovering from the COVID-19 pandemic, addressing climate change, and confronting racial inequity. Ensuring no one is left behind requires a collective effort on issues like poverty, hunger, inequality, environmental resilience, and education that are all included in the SDG framework. Actors around the country are using the SDGs to understand and address systemic barriers and build more resilient and equitable societies.

RESOURCES

Never more urgent: A preliminary review of how the U.S. is leaving Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities behind
SDSN

This report uses the SDGs as a tool to evaluate how well the United States as a whole and specific U.S. states serve Black, Hispanic, and Indigenous communities compared to white communities. It reveals that the biggest disparities are across five major areas: justice, food and housing security, education, economic security, and health. Learn more

How the SDGs can help community foundations respond to COVID-19 and advance racial equity
Charles Stewart Mott Foundation

This report presents an approach for community foundations to use the SDG framework in their work leading revitalization efforts, advancing racial equity, and recovering from the pandemic. It further identifies
SDG indicators to consider in relation to racial equity as well as 190 SDG indicators specifically relevant for the U.S. as a starting point for foundations. 
Learn more

IMPLEMENTATION EXAMPLES

A visualization exploring racial inequality in delivering the SDGs in the U.S.
SDSN

SDSN’s report In the Red: The U.S. Failure to Deliver on a Promise of Racial Equality is accompanied by a data visualization that displays the geographic distribution of racial inequality in the United States. This interactive map allows users to see racial disparities by state and SDG indicator, such as child poverty, employment, and incarceration. The data visualization underscores that on average white communities receive resources and services at a rate 3 times higher than the least served racial group in the United States.
In the red: A visualization exploring racial inequality in delivering the SDGs in the U.S.
Sector Networks

The United States has seen a growth of sector-specific networks focused on implementing the SDGs and building collaboration around sustainable development. They identify tools and methods and support communities of practice to share lessons learned and harness collective knowledge and action.

RESOURCES

Cities: Local leadership on the SDGs Project
The Brookings Institution

The Brookings Institution is at the forefront of research on SDG implementation in cities. The project, Local Leadership on the SDGs, explores the bottom-up approach cities and communities are taking to drive local progress that contributes to global change. The Brookings Institution is a convener and resource for cities and local actors to implement the SDGs. Brookings launched and manages the SDG Leadership City Network, a community of senior government officials from 17 cities across the world that are in the vanguard of pursuing local achievement of the SDGs.
Learn more

Higher education institutions: Sustainable Development Solutions Network USA
SDSN

The SDSN USA network brings together researchers, knowledge creators, and thought leaders to mobilize expertise on the SDGs in the United States and to understand and address sustainable development challenges at the local, state, and national levels. The network focuses on higher education institutions as key actors to implement and mainstream the SDGs. They convene and produce reports, such as
Accelerating Education for the SDGs in Universities, as resources to further SDG action. Learn more

Businesses: Global Compact Network USA
This network of U.S. businesses and subsidiaries aims to put private sector commitments on sustainability into action. It provides resources, guidance, and connections to advance progress on the SDGs and works closely with the UN Global Compact to advance the UN Global Compact Ten Principles. Learn more

Individuals: United Nations Association of the USA
The United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA) is a movement of Americans dedicated to supporting the United Nations. With over 20,000 members, 60 percent under the age of 26, and more than 200 chapters across the country, UNA-USA members are united in their commitment to global engagement and their belief that each person can play a part in advancing the UN’s mission and achieving the SDGs. Learn more

Philanthropy: Council on Foundations
As part of the Council on Foundations’ support for grantmaking foundations and corporations, it offers resources, tools, and events to engage philanthropy in advancing progress on the SDGs and to share best practices. This includes a resource library dedicated to the SDGs as well as ongoing events and webinars. Learn more