

Wesleyan Sustainability Strategic Plan: Annual Report FY 2025 (Accessible Text-Only Version)

Executive Summary

This annual report, the third since Wesleyan's 2022 adoption of the Sustainability Strategic Plan (SSP), captures the progress made on SSP goals during 2024-25.

- **Goal 1: Carbon** aims to eliminate the University's carbon footprint.
 - Wesleyan reduced its carbon footprint 32% from its 2008 baseline in part by converting 70% of campus heating pipes to energy-efficient hot water (up from 57% last year), expanding student public transportation usage more than 500%, and offsetting 100% of faculty and staff air travel for the second year.
- **Goal 2: Curriculum** focuses on creating opportunities for students to engage with sustainability and environmental justice (EJ) through coursework, internships, workshops, and more.
 - 64% of students (up from 54%) engaged in an activity related to sustainability and EJ, such as taking one of 197 sustainability-related courses, completing an internship or research experience, attending a workshop, or leading a sustainability initiative.
- **Goal 3: Community** emphasizes establishing sustainability as a guiding principle in Wesleyan's decision-making and pursuing EJ through connections between Wesleyan and the broader community.
 - The [Holding Hope](#) skill- and community- building workshop series and [Middletown Government Participation Guide](#) launch brought together Wesleyan and Middletown communities in new ways. Dozens of events expanded sustainability education and outreach and international students were newly introduced to sustainability in orientation. Continued waste station and tree planting expansion, as well as removal of invasive plants and new sustainable purchasing initiatives expanded sustainability in campus practices.

For a glossary of terms used in this report, see the last page of this report. For the full text of the 2022 SSP and original version of this report, visit bit.ly/wesleyanssp.

For any questions about this report or the SSP, reach out to Sustainability Director Jen Kleindienst at jkleindienst@wesleyan.edu.

Acknowledgments

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2025 Spotlight

Record Ridership for WesPass

Record Ridership for WesPass

Wesleyan strengthened its commitment to sustainable student transit in 2024–25, reaching new highs with nearly 12,000 XtraMile rides, a fivefold increase from the previous year, and 2,880 RVT bus rides, up by nearly 700 from last year. WesPass has become an integral part of campus life, reflecting rising student demand for convenient, low-emission transportation across Middletown and beyond. The program's growth underscores how sustainability initiatives can drive meaningful behavioral shifts toward more climate-conscious mobility.

Middletown Government Participation Guide Launch Workshop

On March 27, the Bailey College of the Environment, Sustainability Office, Government Department, Jewett Center for Community Partnerships, and Holding Hope Initiative organized an interactive how-to on engaging with local government. Joined by Middletown's then-Mayor Ben Florsheim '14 and Wesleyan students, faculty, and Middletown community members, the discussion-based workshop empowered visitors to get involved in local government.

Food Justice Education Workshop and Amazing Grace Partnership

In collaboration with Amazing Grace Food Pantry, the Bailey College of the Environment hosted two food justice education workshops. Led by Environmental Fellows and Food Security Project Coordinator Malana Rogers-Bursen, students gathered to discuss food access in their local communities and learned about food insecurity in Middletown. The discussion concluded with a volunteer trip to Amazing Grace. In total across the year, 25 students volunteered at the food pantry over the course of 12 trips.

Progress Toward Goals: Carbon

Goal: Wesleyan shall achieve carbon neutrality for all greenhouse gas emissions by 2035.

Wesleyan's carbon footprint has decreased 32% from the 2008 baseline via carbon offsets for air travel, and a phased energy-saving infrastructure upgrade to hot water heating pipes. Emissions decreased 8% from FY 24 because of decreases in employee air travel and reduced heating and cooling loads.

Wesleyan has reduced transportation emissions through the purchase of carbon offsets. Emissions related to campus building heating and hot water, however, have remained at about the same level. In 2024, 82% of GHG emissions came from building energy usage, while 15% came from transportation and 3% came from other sources. The steam-to-hot-water heating pipe conversion that is currently underway will drastically reduce the emissions produced from building energy by lowering the amount of energy required to heat campus buildings.

Progress Toward Goals: Curriculum

Goal: By 2030, approximately 80% of the student body will have taken at least one course, workshop, or research experience that incorporates sustainability and environmental justice.

In 2024-25, 2,132 students —64% of undergraduates, up 10% from 2023-24—engaged in one or more internships, courses, research projects, leadership experiences, workshops, or volunteer activities related to sustainability. This represented an increase of 415 students participating in these activities.

- 2052 students participated in courses and student forums related to sustainability, an increase of 409 students from FY 2024.
- 249 students did internships, leadership, or volunteer work, down 189 students from FY 2024.
- 189 students attended workshops and discussions, up 7 students from FY 2024.
- 94 students participated in other sustainability co-curricular activities, down 55 from FY 2024.

(Note: some students participated in more than one category of activities.)

Progress Toward Goals: Community

Goal: Sustainability is an integral part of Wesleyan's community consciousness, expressed through University practices as well as the individual and collective actions of students, faculty, and staff.

Highlights from 2024-25 include the launch of Community Matchbox, Holding Hope skill- and community-building workshop series, Middletown Government Participation Guide launch, sustainability in international student orientation, continued waste station and tree planting expansion, as well as removal of invasive plants and new sustainable purchasing initiatives.

- **Invasive Plant Workshop and Workdays:** Invasive Plant Workshop and Workdays
- Student Ecological Restoration Interns held several workdays where student participants learned how to identify and manage local invasive species—including garlic mustard, bittersweet, and multiflora rose. The workshops culminated in interactive cleanup parties of the hillside next to Bennet Hall.
- **Matchbox:** The Community Matchbox pilot project launched to help the greater Middletown community and Wesleyan University make connections. Through the Community Matchbox form, campus and community individuals or organizations can share resources and partner with one another. They are currently developing an online directory to further facilitate collaboration.
- **Garden Fest:** In May, the Environmental Solidarity Network hosted its third annual Garden Fest celebration. Student bands performed, surrounded by sustainable vendors, and lawn games. The event raised over \$600 for Amazing Grace Food Pantry in Middletown.

2025 By The Numbers

- **70%** of campus converted from steam to [hot water heating](#), improving efficiency and laying the groundwork for carbon neutrality (FY 2024: 57%)
- **100%** of Wesleyan-funded employee [air travel offset](#) through purchase of pollution allowances on regional greenhouse gas market (FY 2024: 100%)
- **5** hybrid-electric vehicles added to Wesleyan's fleet (FY 2024: 1 hybrid vehicle added)
- **12882** XtraMile on-demand shuttle and River Valley Transit bus riders (FY 2024: 4489 riders)
- **\$12.8 M** privately invested in oil and gas and **0** directly held publicly traded oil and gas stocks (FY 2024: \$17 M invested)
- **197** unique courses in sustainability and environmental justice and **10** courses with new S&EJ integration via [pedagogical initiative](#) (FY 2024: 221 courses)
- **62** courses focused on the intersection of environmental justice and sustainability and **5** EJ-focused courses added (FY 2024: 76 focused courses)
- **69** students' [research funded through Bailey College of the Environment](#) and [Gordon Career Center](#) (FY 2024: 61 students funded)
- **2145** items of clothing circulated at [WesThrift free store](#) (FY 2024: 2305 items of clothing)
- **14** students enrolled in Civic Engagement Practice (CSPL 120) with environmental focus (FY 2024: 8 students)
- **35** trees planted on campus and **78** items added to WB Mason sustainable "swap" options (FY 2024: 37 trees)

Goal 1: Carbon Progress

Objective 1.1: Eliminate fossil fuel usage in buildings

- The first 6 phases of campus [steam-to-hot-water heating pipe conversion](#) are complete, with phase 7 in progress to be completed by this year's heating season. Phase 8 is in construction documents and phase 9 and 10 are in schematic design. Conversion reduces energy use and, coupled with the geothermal test well, sets the groundwork for 100% renewable energy-powered buildings.

Objective 1.2: Offset emissions from Wesleyan air travel

- Wesleyan's air travel offsets program continued its partnership with Climate Vault, a nonprofit organization that purchases carbon allowances from cap-and-trade compliance markets and 'vaults' them so emitters can't use them.
- This year, the Sustainability Office investigated strategies for addressing the ecological footprint of study abroad air travel and has committed to a partnership with Ecuador-based nonprofit Pachaysana to invest financially in "carbon onsetting," which supports ecologically and socially sound economic development in the rural, indigenous Ecuadorian community of Mushullakta.

Objective 1.3: Electrify Wesleyan's vehicle fleet

- The Sustainability and Transportation Offices secured a commitment with Finance to amortize the additional cost to departments of purchasing electric vehicles and has developed a process to review future vehicle purchases.
- An existing electric truck was upgraded in Summer 2024 from a lead-acid to lithium-ion battery, greatly improving performance and functionality for Sustainability Office, Facilities, and Athletics' use.
- Public Safety and Transportation removed 3 gas vehicles and added 2 new electric SUVs, 2 hybrid SUVs, 1 hybrid car, and 1 gas van to the campus fleet. Transportation continues to look for full EV vans but current options involve expensive aftermarket upfitting with less-than-ideal infrastructure to support traveling student vehicles.

Objective 1.4: Reduce single-occupancy cars on campus

- River Valley Transit secured state microtransit funding for 2024-25 and 2025-26 which covers the costs of the XtraMile on-demand shuttle service in part due to Wesleyan's support.
- Extensive outreach efforts for XtraMile and WesPass partnership programs with River Valley Transit buses yielded 2,880 bus rides and 11,784 XtraMile rides, an XtraMile ridership increase of 515% and bus increase of 31% from 2023-24.

Note: No notable progress on objectives 1.5 and 1.6 in FY 2025. Wesleyan does not plan to purchase carbon offsets for non-air travel emissions until 2035 in order to prioritize emissions reduction. The Investments Office remains on track to divest from fossil fuels by 2035.

Goal 1 2025-2026 Key Targets:

- Complete phase 8 and finish design of phases 9 and 10 of steam-to-hot-water conversion.
- Phase 3 of electric vehicle transition plan and implementation.
- Expand advertising of public transportation options to students and employees.

Goal 2: Curriculum Progress

Objective 2.1: Support sustainability curricular integration

- Through funding from the Bailey College of the Environment (BCOE), the [Sustainability and Environmental Justice \(S&EJ\) initiative](#) awarded stipends to 10 faculty course proposals in 2024-2025. In part due to these efforts, 94% of departments included at least one sustainability course in the past three years.
- S&EJ held 3 faculty lunches and catalyzed the Holding Hope workshop series designed to address the grief, despair, and loss associated with modern crises in a collective and constructive way.

Objective 2.2: More annual environmental justice courses

- BCOE added the following courses on food security and environmental justice:
 - ENVS 234 (Accessing Food in the US)
 - ENVS 188 (Neotropical Aquatic Systems)
 - ENVS 294 (Current Issues in Latin America)
 - ENVS 297 (Food Security and Environmental Conservation).
- BCOE added 3 new permanent faculty in sustainability and environmental justice:
 - Christine Caruso (grant-funded to career track Professor of the Practice and Associate Director of Community Engagement in BCOE)
 - Helen Poulos (visiting professor to tenured Distinguished Associate Professor of BCOE)
 - Anthony Cummings (newly hired as tenured Rauch Professor of BCOE).

Objective 2.3: More opportunities for sustainability job development

- The Gordon Career Center organized 3 sustainability-focused careers events: 2 alumni panels and 1 student internship luncheon.
- 46 students' academic year and summer research was funded through Bailey College of the Environment. Additionally, BCOE supported 9 students through faculty-student research grants and 9 students in the Sustainability Office.
- 5 students received Gordon Career Center Wesleyan Summer Grants for their work in sustainability.

Goal 2 2025-2026 Key Targets:

- Launch new student training sessions at the intersection of environmental and social change.
- Add new workshops to build student capacity for activism and civic engagement.
- Expand Gordon Career Center efforts to support students interested in sustainability and environmental justice careers

Goal 3: Community Progress

Objective 3.1: Publicize, educate, and advocate

- Tabling during the Power of Language Week created student engagement and creativity while learning about language for a second year in a row.
- Prepared for integration of sustainability into international student orientation.
- Environmental Solidarity Network (ESN) and The Shed hosted the second annual [Garden Festival](#), which included live music, food, and student vendors.
- ESN also built a campus sustainability archive and resource library, which will be public via the sustainability website and Olin Library in 2025-2026.

Objective 3.2: Partnerships with Middletown

- The Community Matchbox pilot project helps the greater Middletown community and Wesleyan share resources and make connections. Over 2024-25, an interdepartmental team successfully fielded 18 campus-community requests and began work on a community partner database, which gained the following confirmed partners: 20 community organizations, 27 Wesleyan student groups, and 37 Wesleyan faculty and staff.
- Through a grant from the Allbritton Center for the Study of Public Life and support from the Center for the Arts, the Sustainability Office convened students, faculty, staff, and community members to plan and lead a 2-day workshop series, which came to be known as Holding Hope, in October 2024, drawing approximately 60 attendees. The first day focused on building personal resilience skills; the second day focused on community-scale resilience. In Summer 2025, Holding Hope held monthly potluck dinners to continue connections.
- BCOE's Rooted Solidarity initiative led workshops, meetings, and presentations throughout the year, including BIPOC farming workshops, food justice workshops, film screenings, environmental justice conversations, and a food bank comedy night fundraiser, collectively engaging over 500 students, faculty, staff, and community members statewide.
- Rooted Solidarity also hosted the Planting Seeds internship in Summer 2025, connecting 15 students from Wesleyan and 2 high schools with 4 sites statewide working on food justice.
- BCOE, in conjunction with the CT Food System Alliance, launched the CT Food Sovereignty Collective in April 2025 to build power for regenerative, democratic, interdependent food systems that celebrate black, brown, and indigenous food sovereignty.

Objective 3.3: Expand sustainable practice in waste, dining, grounds, and purchasing

- Wesleyan diverted nearly 46% of waste from the landfill through initiatives including expansion of composting locations and trash/recycling standard setups in new locations.
- The ReUser reusable takeout container program maintained a 98% return rate, aided by fines for non-returned containers. ReUser unfortunately went out of business in May 2025.
- For the second time, the Waste Not move-out collection hosted a community garage sale in May and continued paid opportunities for work-study-eligible volunteers to ensure equity.
- Ecological Restoration Interns Isaac Moss '25 and Elanora Smith '27 made documents identifying campus invasive plants, targeted areas for removal, and led removal workdays.
- Created a list with WB Mason to identify and encourage purchases of sustainable products.
- Evaluated opportunities for an office supply swap location on campus and internal "store" within OneSource, where employees can "purchase" office supplies for free from a central repository (donations from across campus departments) to reduce office supply waste.

Goal 3 2025-2026 Key Targets:

- Launch Community Matchbox directories of community groups, student groups, and employees to draw connections between campus and community.
- Create a central campus ecological restoration plan and funding source for replacing invasive plants with native plants.

- Launch a new reusable to-go program for dining.
- Expand WB Mason swap list and preferred pricing for sustainable products.

Financial Snapshot

Total new spend across all 12 SSP objectives was over \$4.67 M in FY 2025 compared to \$5.09 M in FY 2024 and \$6.41 M in FY 2023. The greatest spending in all years was on steam to hot water heating system conversion, at \$3.7M in FY 2025. Notable additional funded projects in FY 2025 included \$168K on sustainable fleet purchases and \$367K on faculty support.

Carbon Spend 2024 vs. 2025

FY 2024: \$4,669,888

FY 2025: \$3,905,014

Curriculum Spend 2024 vs. 2025

FY 2024: \$171,420

FY 2025: \$662,026

Community Spend 2024 vs. 2025

FY 2024: \$ 55,373

FY 2025: \$100,129

Total Spend 2024 vs. 2025

FY 2024: \$4,896,681

FY 2025: \$4,667,169

Glossary

- **amortize:** to reduce or pay off a debt or expense with regular payments
- **Bailey College of the Environment (COE):** founded in 2009, the COE encompasses the home of the environmental studies linked major and minor, a think tank, a student research fellowship program, and a hub of community outreach regarding environmental issues.
- **carbon dioxide (CO₂) allowance:** within the RGGI regulatory market (see below), a pollution permit for emitting one ton of carbon dioxide
- **carbon footprint:** the amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gasses emitted by an entity, usually expressed as MTCO₂e (metric tons of carbon dioxide equivalent)
- **carbon neutrality:** achieving balance between the amount of carbon emitted and the amount of carbon being absorbed by carbon sinks (forests, oceans, soil, etc.)
- **carbon offset:** an action or activity that compensates for the emission of greenhouse gasses, usually by storing carbon or preventing carbon emissions
- **cogeneration (cogen):** the use of waste heat from electricity generation for heating
- **compost:** nutrient-rich organic matter, such as food waste, that has gone through the process of decomposition and can be used as fertilizer
- **environmental justice (EJ):** “the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations and policies”¹
- **Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI):** “a cooperative effort among twelve states, including CT, to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. Within RGGI states, regulated [fossil fuel-fired] power plants [over 25 megawatts] must acquire one allowance for every ton of CO₂ they emit.... Each participating state originates allowances in proportion to its share of the regional cap.”²
- **renewable energy:** “energy derived from natural sources that are replenished at a higher rate than they are consumed,” including solar and wind power³
- **steam-to-hot-water conversion at Wesleyan:** The hotter an object, the more heat it radiates away as waste energy. Steam pipes run constantly and are very hot (about 320 °F). Hot water systems, in contrast, adjust the temperature based on how much heat is required and are better insulated than older steam pipes, reducing wasted energy. Wesleyan’s old steam system is 55% efficient, while the current hot water system is 75% efficient and will increase to 90+% when the conversion is completed in 2029.
- **sustainability:** ensuring health, wellbeing, and equity for all communities without compromising future generations’ quality of life and access to natural resources
- **zero waste:** conservation of resources via responsible production, consumption, reuse, and recovery

¹[19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice.html](https://www.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice.html)

² https://www.rggi.org/sites/default/files/Uploads/Fact%20Sheets/RGGI_101_Factsheet.pdf

³ <https://www.un.org/en/climatechange/what-is-renewable-energy>