

Wesleyan Sustainability Strategic Plan: Annual Report FY 2026

(Accessible Text-Only Version)

Executive Summary

This annual report, the fourth since Wesleyan's 2022 adoption of the Sustainability Strategic Plan (SSP), captures the progress made on SSP goals during 2025-26.

Goal 1: Carbon aims to eliminate the University's carbon footprint.

Wesleyan has reduced its carbon footprint 32% from its 2008 baseline in part by converting 76% of campus heating pipes to energy-efficient hot water (up from 57% last year), expanding student public transportation usage by 50%, and offsetting 100% of faculty and staff air travel for the third year.

Goal 2: Curriculum focuses on creating opportunities for students to engage with sustainability and environmental justice (EJ) through coursework, internships, workshops, and more.

79% of students (up from 64%) 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.

Highlights from 2025-26 include the launch of Play It Forward and SpeakeaSEA, the expansion of housing-related sustainability education for students and Residential Life staff, updates to Wesleyan's bike rental program, the Bailey College of the Environment's activism and advocacy workshop series, sustainability in orientation for international and first generation and low income students, continued outdoor compost bin expansion, and expansion of ecologically beneficial landscaping.

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

The following people and groups contributed greatly to the creation of this Sustainability Strategic Plan Annual Report. Thank you for sharing your time and expertise, Andie Bisceglia, Asper Cisse, Angela Han, Jen Kleindienst, Sasha Lovell, Ava Symons, SAGES Committee, and SSP Committee.

2026 Spotlight

2nd year of record bus ridership

Wesleyan strengthened its commitment to sustainable student transit in 2025–26, doubling both XtraMile and bus ridership to nearly 22,000 rides nearly 12,000 XtraMile rides. WesPass, which allows all students to ride River Valley Transit for free with their WesIDs 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.

New carbon onsetting partnership

Wesleyan began a "carbon onsetting" partnership with Ecuador-based nonprofit Pachaysana to invest financially in "[carbon onsetting](#)," which supports ecologically and socially sound economic development in the rural, indigenous, Amazonian community of Mushullakta. During the first year of this partnership, families in Mushullakta continued building a community-led restoration system. The work combines ecological recovery with food production, cultural continuity, education, and locally generated income.

Spring cutting for ecological resilience

In Prof. Kate Miller's Fall 2025 ENVS 197 class, Kasey Hicks '29 and Syed Noorwez '29 became interested in the invasive mugwort plant, realizing the impact that Wesleyan's land use practices could have on local ecology. Noorwez and Hicks pursued a Spring 2026 tutorial to continue their research and presented recommendations to Facilities in May. Facilities agreed to shift Long Lane meadow cutting from fall to spring, cut grasses and flowers to a higher height, use clippings on site as mulch, and implement educational signage to explain the importance of native plants and these new practices. These changes will support a more diverse ecosystem, improve plant health, and provide habitat for pollinators.

Bike rental program reinvigorated

The WesBikes Rental Program got a refresh through a project led by Asper Cisse '28 in collaboration with Public Safety and the Sustainability Office. The new Bike Rental program received \$21,000 from the Green Fund to purchase Trek FX 1 bikes from local bike shop Pedal Power. As part of the collaboration, Public Safety will cover the additional costs of locks and helmets, as well as provide support for bike storage. This program, which will launch in September 2026, aims to provide students with accessible and sustainable transportation, with priority given to FGLI and international students.

Play It Forward distributes athletic gear

Macie Carlos '27 launched a student-led program Play It Forward in Fall 2025 in collaboration between the Sustainability Office and Athletics. Play It Forward collects sports apparel and gear at several locations on campus in Middletown and works with community partners across Middletown to distribute donations. In its first year, Play It Forward collected, cleaned, and sorted 363 items, including 74 pairs of shoes and a range of athletic clothing, diverting nearly 300 pounds from landfill.

Waste Not donates 7K lbs. to community

Waste Not completed its 18th move-out collection in May 2026. Waste Not is an annual program that fosters equitable sustainability by improving access to low-cost items while reducing campus waste. Thanks to the generous support of the Bailey College of the Environment and Green Fund, all student roles went from volunteer to paid beginning in May 2026. Collection in the Hockey Rink was greatly improved, with capacity to collect many more items for donation and resale. The 3rd annual community sale was open to Wesleyan and the greater Middletown community. The program donated over 7,000 lbs. of textiles during the Waste Not move-out program, more than double from 2025.

Progress Toward Goals: Carbon

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

Wesleyan's carbon footprint has decreased 29% from the 2008 baseline, up 3% from FY 25. Wesleyan's FY 26 carbon footprint **increased from FY 25** primarily because of increases in campus heating and cooling usage, despite reductions in the areas of campus electricity use and employee commuting. Additionally, purchased offsets neutralized 786 tons of FY 26 emissions from employee air travel.

In 2026, 84.4% of GHG emissions came from building energy usage, while 13.3% came from transportation

and 2.4% came from other sources. The Casper Life Sciences Building finished construction in FY 26 and will reduce energy consumption by 44% compared to Hall Atwater, despite being 58% larger.

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 2025-26, 2,402 students—**79% of undergraduates**—engaged in one or more internships, courses, research projects, leadership experiences, workshops, or volunteer activities related to sustainability. This represents a 15% increase from 2024-25.

- 2,382 students participated in courses and student forums related to sustainability, an increase of 330 students from FY 2025.
- 266 students did internships, leadership, or volunteer work.
- 102 students attended workshops and discussions.
- 97 students participated in other sustainability co-curricular activities.

(Note: some students participated in more than one category of activities; the 79% represents unique students.)

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 2025-26 include the launch of Play It Forward and SpeakeaSEA, the expansion of housing-related sustainability education for students and Residential Life staff, updates to Wesleyan's bike rental program, the Bailey College of the Environment's activism and advocacy workshop series, sustainability in orientation for international and first generation and low income students, continued outdoor compost bin expansion, and expansion of ecologically beneficial landscaping.

- SpeakeaSEA: Founded by Ryan Wong '27 and Huong Huang '27, SpeakeaSEA shares homemade Southeast Asian meals while raising awareness about climate change and food justice through their "buy a meal, give a meal" model. Nearly 200 students participated in spring workshops or supported the student organization.
- Res Life Sustainability Education: Environmental Fellow Sasha Lovell '28 and Compost Interns Julia Chadwick '28 and Ethan Lee '26 developed lesson plans to teach Office of Residential Life student staff about dorm sustainability guidelines and environmental resources on campus. They eventually met with all 100 student staff members. In Summer 2026, Res Life sustainability programming was expanded to reach all students at the start of the Fall semester.
- Garden Fest: In May, the Environmental Solidarity Network hosted its fourth annual Garden Fest celebration. Student bands performed, surrounded by sustainable vendors, and lawn games. The event raised over \$1,500 for Amazing Grace Food Pantry in Middletown, more than double 2025 fundraising.

2026 By The Numbers

- Objective 1.1 (Eliminate fossil fuel use in buildings): 76% of campus converted from steam to hot water heating, improving efficiency and laying the groundwork for carbon neutrality (FY 2025: 70%)
- Objective 1.2 (Offset emissions from Wesleyan air travel): 100% of Wesleyan-funded employee air travel offset through purchase of pollution allowances on regional greenhouse gas market (FY 2025: 100%)

- Objective 1.3 (Electrify Wesleyan's vehicle fleet): 0 electric and hybrid vehicles added to Wesleyan's fleet (FY 2025: 5 electric and hybrid vehicles added)
- Objective 1.4 (Reduce single-occupancy cars on campus): 21,918 XtraMile on-demand shuttle and River Valley Transit bus rides (FY 2025: 12,882 rides)
- Objective 1.6 (Divest from fossil fuels by 2035): \$6.7M privately invested in oil and gas and 0 directly held publicly traded oil and gas stocks (FY 2025: \$12.8 M invested)
- Objective 2.1 (Support sustainability curricular integration): 197 unique courses in sustainability and environmental justice and 8 courses with new S&EJ integration via pedagogical initiative (FY 2025: 197 courses and 8 new courses)
- Objective 2.2 (More annual environmental justice courses): 60 courses focused on the intersection of environmental justice and sustainability and 5 EJ-focused courses added (FY 2025: 62 focused courses)
- Objective 2.3 (More opportunities for sustainability job development): 50 students' research funded through Bailey College of the Environment and Gordon Career Center (FY 2025: 69 students funded)
- Objective 3.1 (Publicize, educate, and advocate): 55 student and community groups tabled at Garden Fest and \$1,500 raised for Amazing Grace Food Pantry at Garden Fest (FY 2025: 36 groups tabled)
- Objective 3.2 (Partnerships with Middletown): 48 community and student groups in the Community Matchbox directory (FY 2025: 41 groups tabled)
- Objective 3.3 (Expand sustainable practices in waste, dining, grounds, and purchasing): 1,396 items of clothing circulated at WesThrift free store and \$40K invested in new electric lawnmower (FY 2025: 2,145 items of clothing)

Goal 1: Carbon Progress Details

Objective 1.1: Eliminate fossil fuel usage in buildings

- Phase 7 of campus [steam-to-hot-water heating pipe conversion](#) is complete, with phase 8 in progress. 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.
- The carbon impact of campus heating and cooling usage increased nearly 8% due to increased energy demand.
- An additional \$14.5M must be obtained to complete the HW conversion work. Heat pumps and well fields are estimated at an additional \$87M.

Objective 1.2: Offset emissions from Wesleyan air travel

- Wesleyan's air travel offsets program continued to cover 100% of employee air travel emissions through its partnership with Climate Vault, a nonprofit that purchases carbon allowances from cap-and-trade compliance markets and prevents emitters from using them.
- Wesleyan began its carbon "onsetting" partnership with Fundación Pachaysana in Summer 2025. Pachaysana's Rehearsing Change program supports sustainable economic development in the Indigenous Ecuadorian community of Mushullakta, and Wesleyan's contribution supports increased family income, tree planting, local food production, education access, and expanding opportunities for women's leadership.

Objective 1.3: Electrify Wesleyan's vehicle fleet

- The Jewett Center for Community Partnerships replaced an aging minivan with another gas powered minivan, as there were no viable hybrid or EV options within budget. Another gas minivan is slated to be replaced with a hybrid in FY 27, which will retire 2 vehicles and replace with 1 vehicle.
- Transportation Services' new vehicle procurement form is completed, but Public Safety and Facilities have not yet needed a new vehicle purchase.

Objective 1.4: Reduce single-occupancy cars on campus

- River Valley Transit secured state microtransit funding to cover the costs of the XtraMile on-demand shuttle service. Hundreds of Wesleyan students provided testimony in support of SB-9; the enacted bill funding the XtraMile program through May 2027.
- Extensive outreach efforts for XtraMile and WesPass partnership programs with River Valley Transit buses yielded 4,437 bus rides and 17,481 XtraMile rides, a bus ridership increase of 54% and XtraMile increase of 48% from 2024-25.
- Environmental Fellow Asper Cisse '28 and Marc Esposito '26 worked with Public Safety beginning in Fall 2025 to develop improvements to the WesBikes Rental program. The new program will launch in Fall 2026, with Public Safety contributing \$3-5K annually to support maintenance.
- Mark Esposito '26 and Melissa DiMarco researched viable pathways for ride-share return to campus.

Note: No notable progress on objectives 1.5 and 1.6 in FY 2026. 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 2026-2027 Key Targets:

- Secure funding to complete steam to hot water conversion.
- Secure funding for continuation of the WesPass free transit option for students.
- Implement electric vehicle purchasing form with next department needing a new vehicle.

Goal 2: Curriculum Progress Details

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 8 faculty course proposals in 2025-2026.
- S&EJ held 1 faculty lunch with Professor Elan Abrell, 1 interdisciplinary workshop with artist Eli Nixon, and 1 faculty informal lunch to engage the faculty cohort.

Objective 2.2: More annual environmental justice courses

- 600 students enrolled in courses with environmental justice content, which remain popular with Intro to Environmental Studies standing out as reaching 184 students through 5 different sections and a waitlist of 146.

Objective 2.3: More opportunities for sustainability job development

- The Gordon Career Center organized no sustainability-focused career events, but supported a Wesleyan Women in Science career panel with alumni in climate and environmental science consulting.
- 40 new sustainability-focused alumni were added to the WesLink mentoring roster.
- The semester-long Wesleyan Sustainable Careers Initiative was developed to start in September 2026, with 12 students selected for participation in the program during its inaugural year.
- 37 students' academic year and summer research was funded through the Bailey College of the Environment. 13 additional students received Gordon Career Center Wesleyan Summer Grants for their work in sustainability.

Goal 2 2026-2027 Key Targets:

- Expand sustainability & environmental justice pedagogical initiative to represent more departments.
- Continue workshops to build student capacity for activism and civic engagement with a specific focus on the intersection of sustainability and justice, legislative action, and community organizing.

- Launch Gordon Career Center program to support students interested in sustainability and environmental justice careers.

Goal 3: Community Progress Details

Objective 3.1: Publicize, educate, and advocate

- In Fall 2025, the Bailey College of the Environment and Environmental Solidarity Network, led by BCOE staff and a team of students, led a town hall about activism and advocacy. Following this engaging workshop, the planning team developed a five-session Activism & Advocacy workshop series with community facilitators in Spring 2026.
- Tabling during the Power of Language Week created student engagement and creativity while teaching students about language for a third year in a row.
- The past two summers, Summer Office Coordinators prepared for the integration of sustainability into orientation for first generation, low income, and international students, while expanding sustainability education for Office of Residential Life student staff.
- Environmental Solidarity Network (ESN) and The Shed hosted the annual [Garden Festival](#), which included live music, food, and student vendors.

Objective 3.2: Partnerships with Middletown

- The Community Matchbox pilot project helps the greater Middletown community and Wesleyan share resources and make connections. Over summer and Fall 2025, an interdepartmental team investigated alternative platforms for the community directory and identified GivePulse. This platform was cost prohibitive for the academic year, so a public launch of the temporary Airtable platform was held in February 2026 with some success in student follow-up engagement. Trial access to GivePulse occurred in May-June 2026. Intended launch of the new platform is January 2027 or Summer 2027.
- [BCOE's Rooted Solidarity initiative](#) hosted 11 events in 2025-26, including a workshop on indigenous food history and a food justice field trip. Rooted Solidarity employed 3 students throughout the year.
- The Rooted Solidarity Planting Seeds internship engaged 10 Wesleyan and Connecticut students at statewide sites to engage in food growing and justice work.

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

- Wesleyan diverted 44% of waste from the landfill through initiatives including expansion of composting locations and trash/recycling standard setups in new locations. Trash production grew by 10%.
- After ReUser went out of business in May 2025, student reluctance to create a new program prevented the uptake of a new reusable takeout container collection system in FY26.
- The Waste Not move-out collection hosted the third annual community garage sale in May and donated over 7,000 lbs. of textiles, more than double 2025. For the first time the Bailey College of the Environment and Green Fund supported the payment of all student workers beginning in May 2026. Fall 2025 sale earnings returned to over \$10,000 for the first time since 2022.
- This campus ecological restoration plan for Wesleyan University continues to be executed, with removal of invasive bushes, trees, and ground cover and replanting native species. Ecological Restoration Intern Elanora Smith '27 and Bella Migliore '28 led invasives removal workdays.
- Purchasing and the Sustainability Office worked with Unimarket to implement the Office Supply Free Store, where employees across campus departments can exchange office supplies to reduce waste at a permanent physical location. The store is set to open in September 2026.

Goal 3 2026-2027 Key Targets:

- Expand Community Matchbox directories of community groups and student groups to draw connections between campus and community.

- Secure funding for ecological restoration projects on campus to replace invasive plants with native alternatives.
- Launch Office Supply Free Store to reduce unneeded office supply purchases, saving waste and money.

Financial Snapshot

Total new spend across all 12 SSP objectives was over \$6.91 M in FY 2026 compared to \$4.65 M in FY 2025, \$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 and was \$6.0 M in FY 2026. Notable additional funded projects in FY 2026 included \$371K on faculty support and \$367K on student sustainability professional development.

Carbon spend to date

FY 2026: \$5,979,960

FY 2025: \$3,930,014

FY 2024: \$4,669,888

FY 2023: \$5,971,231

Curriculum spend to date

FY 2026: \$737,762

FY 2025: \$662,026

FY 2024: \$361,973

FY 2023: \$369,331

Community spend to date

FY 2026: \$189,643

FY 2025: \$ 62,129

FY 2024: \$ 55,373

FY 2023: \$ 65,075

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

¹19january2021snapshot.epa.gov/environmentaljustice/learn-about-environmental-justice_.html

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

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