# SCSA: Sustainability Center Self-Assessment Guide

This self-evaluation tool is designed to help early childhood education centers assess and improve their sustainability practices. Each question covers various aspects of center operations, including waste management, energy use, and sustainable practices.

## 1. Waste Management

### Composting

- Do you compost food scraps and other organic waste? (Yes/No)
- How frequently is composting monitored and maintained? (1-5, with 1 being rarely and 5 being daily)
- Do you separate compostable items from general waste in your classrooms and kitchen? (Yes/No)
- Do you use the compost for gardening or other educational purposes? (Yes/No)
- Do you educate children about the composting process? (Yes/No)

### Recycling

- Do you have recycling bins accessible in all areas? (Yes/No)
- Is recycling information clearly labeled for proper sorting? (1-5, with 1 being unclear and 5 being very clear)
- Do you regularly audit or track the amount of recycled materials? (Yes/No)
- Are there specific staff or children responsible for ensuring recycling is done properly? (Yes/No)
- Do you have a partnership with a local recycling facility to ensure proper disposal? (Yes/No)

### Food Waste

- Do you have a system in place to track and reduce food waste? (Yes/No)
- Are leftover foods regularly donated or repurposed to minimize waste? (Yes/No)
- Do you repurpose food or other waste objects for play (e.g., sensory bins)? (Yes/No)
- Do you engage children in activities around food waste, such as portioning or discussing sustainable food practices? (Yes/No)
- Do you educate children and families on reducing food waste at home? (Yes/No)
- Do you encourage families to bring waste-free or compostable lunch containers? (Yes/No)

### Zero-Waste Initiatives

- Are there programs or classroom practices in place aimed at achieving zero-waste goals? (Yes/No)
- Do you have a waste audit system in place to monitor and track overall waste reduction? (Yes/No)
- Do you encourage families to participate in zero-waste efforts at home? (Yes/No)
- Are reusable materials (e.g., water bottles, cloth napkins) regularly used in place of single-use items? (Yes/No)
- Do you have a designated area for sorting waste, recyclables, and compost? (Yes/No)

### Single-Use Items and Disposable Materials

- Do you use paper towels in classrooms or staff areas? (Yes/No)
- Do you provide plastic bags for use in classrooms or for personal storage? (Yes/No)
- Do you use plastic wrap for food storage or other purposes? (Yes/No)
- Do you use paper plates or single-use dishes and utensils? (Yes/No)
- Have you implemented alternatives to these disposable items (e.g., cloth towels, reusable containers, washable dishes)? (Yes/No)

## 2. Energy Efficiency + Renewable Energy

### Renewable Energy Sources

- Does your center use renewable energy sources (e.g., solar, wind, geothermal)? (Yes/No)

### Lighting

- Do you use LED or other energy-efficient light bulbs throughout the center? (Yes/No)
- Do you use dimmable lights in classrooms and activity spaces to reduce energy use? (Yes/No)
- Are lights regularly turned off when rooms are not in use? (1-5)
- Do you have sensors that automatically turn lights on and off when rooms are occupied or empty? (Yes/No)

### Natural Lighting

- Does your building make use of natural light through windows or skylights to reduce electricity usage? (Yes/No)

### Appliances

- Are appliances in your center ENERGY STAR certified for energy efficiency? (Yes/No)
- Are appliances unplugged or turned off when not in use to save energy? (1-5)

### Programmable Power Strips

- Are programmable power strips used to prevent energy waste when devices are not in use? (Yes/No)

### Heating and Cooling

- Do you monitor and adjust heating/cooling settings based on occupancy? (1-5)
- Is weatherproofing maintained to reduce heating and cooling needs? (Yes/No)

### Window Film

- Is energy-efficient window film applied to reduce heat loss or solar gain? (Yes/No)

### Energy-Saving Practices

- Do you use programmable thermostats to manage energy use? (Yes/No)

## 3. Water Conservation

### Water Efficiency

- Are low-flow faucets and toilets installed in restrooms? (Yes/No)
- Do you have a system in place for regularly checking for and fixing leaks? (Yes/No)

### Eco-Friendly Watering

- Do you use rain barrels or other eco-friendly methods (soaker hoses, drip tape, drip irrigation,olla pots) to water plants and gardens? (Yes/No)

### Water Education

- Do you engage children in water conservation activities or discussions? (1-5)
- Do outdoor play areas incorporate natural water collection (e.g., rain barrels)? (Yes/No)

### Water for Staff

- Do you provide plastic bottles for staff to drink water? (Yes/No)
- Do you provide reusable water bottles for staff? (Yes/No)
- Do you have water fountains available for staff use? (Yes/No)
- Do you provide water jugs or pitchers in staff areas? (Yes/No)
- Do you encourage staff to bring their own reusable water containers? (Yes/No)
- Are water conservation practices in place (e.g., turning off water when not in use)? (Yes/No)

### Water Systems

### Bottleless Systems

- Do you use bottleless water coolers or dispensers? (Yes/No)
- Are these systems available in staff or common areas? (Yes/No)
- Do you find bottleless systems to be cost-effective and convenient? (Yes/No)

### Bottled Water Systems

- Do you use bottled water delivery services for the office or staff areas? (Yes/No)
- Are you using flexible delivery options for your bottled water needs? (Yes/No)

### Reverse Osmosis Systems

- Do you have a reverse osmosis water filtration system in place? (Yes/No)
- Is the reverse osmosis system used for staff or children’s drinking water? (Yes/No)

## 4. Sustainable Purchasing and Materials

### Supplies and Materials

- Do you prioritize using recycled, natural, or eco-friendly materials in activities? (Yes/No)
- Are single-use plastics avoided or minimized in daily activities? (1-5)

## Furniture and Classroom Materials

### Sustainable Furniture

- Is furniture made from sustainable or recycled materials? (Yes/No)

### Non-Toxic Materials

- Do you purchase toys and supplies that are free from harmful chemicals (BPA, PVC, etc.)? (Yes/No)

### Donations or Used Items

- Do you ask for donations or buy used furniture and classroom materials to reduce waste? (Yes/No)

## Office Supplies

- Do you purchase recycled paper and eco-friendly office supplies? (1-5)
- Is your printer set to double-sided printing to reduce paper waste? (Yes/No)
- Do you use digital documents and communication to reduce paper use? (1-5)

## Digital vs. Paper

- Do you minimize paper use by incorporating more digital tools in the classroom? (Yes/No)

## Art Supplies

- Are nontoxic paints and eco-friendly art materials used in classrooms? (Yes/No)
- Do you incorporate recycled or natural materials in art activities? (Yes/No)

## Purchasing Practices

- Do you prioritize purchasing supplies locally to reduce your carbon footprint? (Yes/No)
- Do you buy from companies that align with your mission and values on sustainability? (Yes/No)
- Are recycled or eco-friendly office supplies used? (Yes/No)
- Is the printer set to double-sided printing by default? (Yes/No)
- Is the printer set to black and white printing by default? (Yes/No)

## Sustainable Bulletin Boards

- Do you use bulletin boards or displays to share information and updates? (Yes/No)
- Are bulletin boards designed to be reused or refreshed with minimal waste (e.g., using reusable materials, recycled paper)? (1-5)
- Do you incorporate eco-friendly materials (e.g., recycled paper, eco-friendly adhesives) for bulletin boards? (Yes/No)

**Printed Materials**

- Do you use printed worksheets in the classroom? (Yes/No)
- If yes, do you make an effort to use recycled paper for worksheets? (Yes/No)
- Do you use digital alternatives to printed worksheets when possible? (Yes/No)
- Do you encourage the reuse of printed materials, such as using the back of printed pages for drawing or note-taking? (Yes/No)

## 5. Kitchen and Food Services

**Food Source and Quality**

- Do you source food locally or prioritize organic, seasonal ingredients? (Yes/No)
- Are plant-based options included regularly in the children's menu? (1-5)
- Do you buy food in bulk to reduce packaging waste and encourage sustainability? (Yes/No)

**Food Preparation and Serving**

- Do you serve meals in a family-style setting where children and teachers eat together? (Yes/No)
- Is food prepared in-house rather than being outsourced or pre-packaged? (Yes/No)

**Child and Adult Food Program (CAFP)**

- Do you participate in the Child and Adult Food Program (CAFP) for providing nutritious meals? (Yes/No)

**Waste Reduction**

- Do you avoid using single-use coffee makers (like Keurig) in the staff kitchen? (Yes/No)
- Do you use reusable dishware and utensils for meals and snacks? (1-5)
- Are food scraps collected and composted? (Yes/No)
-

### Sustainable Food Storage

- Do you use eco-friendly food storage options, such as reusable containers or compostable wraps? (Yes/No)

## 6. Health and Wellness

### Healthy Eating

- Do you promote healthy eating habits by offering nutritious meals and snacks, especially those with organic or locally sourced ingredients? (Yes/No)

### Mental Health and Wellbeing

- Do you provide opportunities for children and staff to engage in mindfulness practices or other mental health initiatives connected to environmental well-being? (Yes/No)

## 7. Green Cleaning Practices

### Eco-Friendly Cleaning Supplies

- Do you use biodegradable, non-toxic cleaning products in classrooms and kitchens? (Yes/No)
- Are air fresheners and cleaning products free from harsh chemicals and artificial fragrances? (Yes/No)
- Are cleaning rags and mops washable and reusable instead of single-use disposables? (1-5)

### Cleaning Protocols

- Are sustainable practices (e.g., using cold water, minimizing chemical use) part of cleaning routines? (1-5)
- Do you engage children in simple, safe cleaning activities with eco-friendly products? (1-5)

## 8. Environmental Education and Engagement

### Curriculum

- Do you incorporate sustainability and nature-based activities in the curriculum? (1-5)
- Do children participate in gardening or plant-growing activities? (Yes/No)
- Are outdoor activities and nature exploration regularly included? (1-5)
- Do you incorporate sustainability and nature-based activities? (Yes/No)

- Do you use **Developmentally Appropriate Practices (DAP)** in your curriculum? (Yes/No)
- Do you use **Inquiry-Based Learning** to foster curiosity and exploration? (Yes/No)
- Do you provide **Authentic Materials** (e.g., natural objects, real-world items) in your learning activities? (Yes/No)

#### Cultural Sustainability

- Does your curriculum include diverse cultural perspectives on sustainability, including Indigenous knowledge of nature and environmental stewardship? (Yes/No)

### Family and Community Involvement

- Do you engage families in sustainability initiatives (e.g., recycling drives, eco-events)? (Yes/No)
- Do you host sustainability workshops or events open to the community? (1-5)

### Partnerships with Local Environmental Groups

- Do you partner with local environmental organizations or businesses to support your sustainability goals? (Yes/No)

### Collaboration with Schools or Community Centers

- Do you collaborate with local schools or community centers on sustainability projects or education? (Yes/No)

## 9. Climate Change Awareness

### Teaching about Climate Change

- Do you teach young children about climate change, its impacts, and what can be done to help the planet? (Yes/No)

### Action-Oriented Projects

- Do you engage children in projects that have a direct impact on reducing carbon footprints, such as planting trees or creating a community garden? (Yes/No)

## 10. Sustainable Transportation and Operations

### Transportation

- Do you encourage walking, cycling, or carpooling among staff and families? (1-5)
- Is there a secure bike parking area available for staff and families? (Yes/No)

### Electric Car Charging

- Is there an electric car charging station on site for staff and visitors? (Yes/No)

### Green Certifications and Practices

- Have you obtained any certifications for eco-friendly practices (e.g., Green Business Certification)? (Yes/No)
- Do you regularly assess and update policies to improve sustainability? (1-5)

## 11. Outdoor Spaces for Nature-Based Learning and Mindfulness

### Outdoor Learning Spaces

- Do you have outdoor spaces designed for nature-based learning and exploration? (Yes/No)

### Nature Play

- Are natural materials (e.g., sticks, rocks, leaves) used in outdoor play areas? (Yes/No)

### Outdoor Relaxation for Staff

- Are there designated outdoor areas for teachers to relax on breaks? (Yes/No)
- Are these areas designed with eco-friendly materials and landscaping? (Yes/No)

## 12. Gardening and Eco-Friendly Practices

### Children's Gardening Activities

- Do the children participate in growing their own food, such as vegetables or herbs? (Yes/No)

- Do you incorporate gardening activities that teach children about plant life cycles and sustainability? (1-5)

**Eco-Friendly Gardening Practices**

- Do you avoid chemical pesticides and fertilizers, opting for natural alternatives? (Yes/No)
- Do you use compost or other organic materials to enrich the soil? (Yes/No)
- Are native or drought-resistant plants used in outdoor spaces? (Yes/No)
- Do you use rain barrels or any eco-friendly watering methods for plants and gardens? (Yes/No)

**Respecting Local Ecology**

- Do you incorporate local ecological knowledge and native plants into your learning environment? (Yes/No)

**Indoor Plants**

- Do you introduce plants into the indoor spaces to improve air quality and create a green learning environment? (Yes/No)

## 13. Social Justice and Equity

**Diversity and Inclusion**

- Are sustainability practices designed to be inclusive and accessible for all children and families, regardless of socioeconomic background? (Yes/No)

**Food Justice**

- Do you teach children about food justice, such as the importance of equitable access to healthy food for all communities? (Yes/No)

**Community Outreach**

- Do you engage in community outreach to support families in need, such as food donation programs or partnerships with local organizations? (Yes/No)

## 14. Eco-Friendly Events and Celebrations

**Sustainable Event Practices**

- Are your center's events (e.g., holiday celebrations, field trips) planned with sustainability in mind (e.g., using reusable materials, avoiding single-use plastics)? (Yes/No)

**Inclusive Event Planning**

- Do your events take into account the cultural diversity and values of all families involved? (Yes/No)

## 15. Staff Development & Engagement

**Sustainability Training for Staff**

- Do staff members receive regular training on sustainability and eco-friendly practices? (Yes/No)

**Incentives for Sustainable Practices**

- Are there incentives or recognition programs in place to encourage staff to adopt sustainable practices? (Yes/No)

## Scoring & Reflection

After completing the assessment, reflect on your scores and consider areas where your center excels and areas for improvement. Set 2-3 actionable goals to further enhance sustainability within your center, such as increasing recycling efforts, upgrading to energy-efficient lighting, adding composting practices, or choosing eco-friendly cleaning supplies.

## Action Goals for Improvement:

1.

2.

3.