Sustainability Manager: Salary, Job Description, and Requirements

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As industries scramble to meet the growing demands of environmental responsibility, the role of sustainability managers is emerging as one of the most critical in the workforce. From managing corporate carbon footprints to navigating new environmental regulations, sustainability managers do indispensable work.

Alongside the growing demand for professionals with expertise in driving eco-friendly changes comes a competitive sustainability manager salary. Those interested in pursuing this rewarding career can develop the requisite skills and knowledge with an advanced degree in energy management.

Sustainability Manager Job Description

Sustainability managers help organizations integrate sustainable practices across a wide range of industries. While the role originated primarily in corporate social responsibility departments, sustainability managers now work across sectors including energy, construction, manufacturing, government, and technology.

Whether analyzing energy consumption data to find ways to cut carbon emissions or working with product teams to develop strategies that reuse materials and minimize waste, sustainability managers help organizations achieve both environmental and financial sustainability.

Key Responsibilities of Sustainability Managers

Sustainability managers develop and implement strategies that make organizations greener and more efficient.

Assessing and Reducing Environmental Impact

Sustainability managers examine how organizations use energy and resources, then devise plans to implement more efficient practices that help cut waste, lower energy use, and reduce carbon emissions.

In manufacturing facilities, a sustainability manager may conduct an audit of the production process to pinpoint sources of waste. Based on the findings, the sustainability manager could introduce a system to recycle production scraps that were previously discarded or redesign workflows to reduce material waste from the start.

In an office, a sustainability manager may analyze the building’s energy consumption data to find inefficiencies, such as outdated HVAC systems or unneeded office lighting. After assessing this data, they may implement automated lighting systems that adjust based on occupancy, or they may install energy-efficient HVAC systems.

Sourcing Sustainable Materials and Products

Sustainability managers work with suppliers and other partners to ensure that the materials and products a company uses have a lower environmental impact. For example, in the fashion industry, a sustainability manager may help source fabrics made from organic cotton or recycled materials and push for natural dyes or biodegradable fabrics in place of harmful dyes and chemicals.

In the technology industry, sustainability managers may negotiate deals to buy electronic components made from recycled materials or ensure that products are

designed to be recycled when they are no longer usable.

Ensuring Compliance and Reporting

Sustainability managers ensure that their organizations comply with environmental regulations and meet sustainability standards. This can involve various actions, depending on the industry. In the energy sector, a sustainability manager may implement technologies that capture carbon dioxide emissions from power plants before they can enter the atmosphere.

In construction, a sustainability manager may guide a team through the LEED certification process for constructing a building, ensuring that the project meets specific environmental standards.

Sustainability managers then write detailed reports that show the impact of their efforts.

How to Become a Sustainability Manager

Sustainability managers require a combination of skills; industry knowledge; and, often, advanced education. The steps below can lead to a successful career in the field.

Step 1: Earn a Bachelor’s Degree

Sustainability managers need at least a bachelor’s degree in environmental science, sustainability, business, or a related field. These programs equip individuals with a foundational understanding of the environmental, economic, and social aspects of sustainability, all of which factor into green initiatives.

Step 2: Gain Experience

Before stepping into a sustainability manager role, professionals need practical experience in fields that focus on environmental management, resource conservation, business operations, or project coordination. Many sustainability managers start in roles such as environmental coordinator, energy manager, or sustainability analyst. These positions provide hands-on experience in managing environmental policies, conducting sustainability assessments, and overseeing

green initiatives.

Additionally, professionals may work in government agencies, in nongovernmental organizations, or for community-based sustainability projects, in which they can gain valuable experience in applying sustainable practices across different sectors and settings.

Step 3: Earn a Master’s Degree

To advance in the sustainability field and qualify for higher-level roles, many professionals opt for a master’s degree, such as a Master of Management in Energy. This type of program equips students with specialized knowledge in key areas, such as energy data analysis, energy fundamentals and trading, and energy risk management.

Courses that focus on energy and environmental economics and energy modeling can provide critical insights into balancing sustainability with economic considerations. Classes focused on energy industry projects and energy investment banking can prepare sustainability managers to lead environmental and financial decision-making across various sectors.

In addition to advanced degrees, earning credentials, such as LEED certification, can demonstrate expertise in sustainable design and energy-efficient practices, further improving one’s career prospects.

Sustainability Manager Salary and Job Outlook

Professionals in sustainability saw some of the largest pay increases in the field over the past decade, according to the State of the Sustainability Profession 2024 report by Trellis. The report also found that more than three-quarters of companies reported boosting the head count of their sustainability teams in just the past two years.

Salaries reflect the increased importance of sustainability professionals. Sustainability managers made a median annual salary of approximately $92,800 as of November 2024, with top earners making up to $146,000, according to Payscale.

The need for sustainability managers has skyrocketed in recent years as industries face mounting pressure to meet environmental goals. According to LinkedIn’s 2024

Global Climate Talent Stocktake report, global demand for professionals with green skills is surging. Between 2023 and 2024, demand for green talent grew by almost 12 percent, while supply only increased by around 6 percent.

It does not stop there — by 2050, the number of jobs requiring green skills is expected to be double the number of qualified candidates available to fill those roles.

Take the Lead in Shaping a Sustainable Future

As the world shifts toward greener practices, the work of sustainability managers grows ever more important. Not only is a sustainability manager's salary competitive, but also professionals in the role have a chance to make a meaningful impact in the fight to protect the planet.

For professionals with the right combination of green skills, industry expertise, and advanced education, the future is bright — and green. Tulane University offers a comprehensive advanced degree program that equips graduates with the skills to lead sustainability initiatives across diverse sectors, from energy management to environmental economics.

Are you ready to elevate your career and become a leader in the green economy? Explore how Tulane's Master of Management in Energy can help you unlock high-level sustainability roles and create real change in the world.

Sources:

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