Accelerating Campus Sustainability & Climate Action

A Proposal to Reallocate the Green Fund

Executive Summary

The Office of Sustainability, with support from the Office of Business Affairs and the Office of the Provost, proposes the reallocation of student tuition carveout funds from the Green Fund to the Office. Such a reallocation would strengthen existing sustainability projects and programs that advance the University’s critical environmental, social justice, and climate goals, as outlined in the Strategic Plan, and enable the creation of new, enduring, strategic initiatives and more student-facing, experiential engagement opportunities in sustainability. It would also centralize sustainability efforts on campus by empowering and expanding capacity for the Office, thereby enhancing the University of Arizona’s leadership in addressing the climate crisis and broader environmental and social issues. Finally, given the ever more imperative global need for significant progress in addressing human impacts on the climate, this reallocation will significantly accelerate campus sustainability and climate action, enabling the University to measurably advance its critical climate neutrality and sustainability goals.

Background

The Green Fund and Office of Sustainability were established in 2010 through a student tuition carveout and were jointly tasked with making the University of Arizona a more sustainable place to live, work, and learn. At the time of founding, the Green Fund was allocated $400,000 and the Office of Sustainability $200,000. Since then, quantifiable campus sustainability efforts have evolved dramatically, shifting from being largely driven by students, one-off projects, and isolated grassroots efforts, to being primarily driven by the Office of Sustainability and its administrative partners. The Office has been charged with directly improving and overseeing the operational and student engagement aspects of sustainability, and indirectly with improving research and academic outcomes while working with capable partners, including the Arizona Institutes for Resilience (AIR).

Proposal

The reallocation of the sustainability tuition carveout ($400,000) would be applied through the Office of Sustainability in collaboration with a new Student Advisory Board, which will be developed in partnership with the current Green Fund Committee. This Student Advisory Board will increase student voice in the development, implementation, and tracking of the University’s long-term priorities and initiatives across all three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic. The Board will also coordinate with relevant stakeholders on- and off-campus to gather information that will assist in guiding the Office of Sustainability’s operations.

See “Implementation” for additional details. If approved, this proposal would increase the Office of Sustainability’s total permanent funding to $850,000 annually by FY 2024.

Advantages

- Enables more efficient use of student tuition resources while honoring the original purpose of the carveout and ensuring student involvement in meaningful climate and sustainability action.
- Improves clarity regarding the impact of these funds on the University’s mission and the benefits to students, via new strategic planning and reporting processes through the Office.
● Centralizes disparate sustainability projects, programs, and initiatives under the Office’s leadership, ensuring a unified holistic vision, going forward.

● Accelerates improvement of the University’s standings in ratings and rankings, including the Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education (AASHE), Princeton Review, Times Higher Education Impact Rankings, and others.

● Reinforces the institution’s investments in sustainability and climate action without the need to identify new resources to meet the institution’s commitments through the Office of Sustainability for the next several years.

Disadvantages

● Potential disappointment from campus community members who have historically relied on startup capital and/or multi-year support from the Green Fund for their sustainability projects. Recognizing that this is a significant change for campus affiliates, this proposal includes support for internal programming and campus partner initiatives to minimize this concern.

● A perception that students would lose the ability to directly influence initiatives of particular interest to their needs. Recognizing that this could negatively impact the student voice in campus sustainability, this proposal includes the creation of the Student Advisory Board, whose independence will be ensured through collaboratively drafted governance documents and third-party checkpoints if necessary.

Implementation

● Decision-makers within Academic Affairs & Academic Administration have cut $100,000 of the $400,000 carveout under the Green Fund’s control. This proposal posits that this funding be returned to the Office of Sustainability, if possible, in FY 2024 which would allow time for this change to be built into budgeting processes.

● $33,500 has already been allocated by the Green Fund to one project for FY 2022, and this commitment should be honored. The Office can effectively oversee any needs of this project.

● Other funding that has already been allocated, but not yet spent, will be honored where the Green Fund Committee deems appropriate. The Office will oversee the needs and relevant compliance reporting requirements of these projects as well.

Considerations

Why is the Office of Sustainability uniquely qualified to effectively administer these funds, as described above? Since the Office “rebooted” in summer 2018, it has orchestrated unprecedented advancements across the University’s sustainability and climate commitments, including:

● Partnering with Tucson Electric Power to source the entirety of the University’s purchased electricity from renewable resources, thereby eliminating 100% of the University's scope two greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions and reducing our GHG footprint by nearly one-third.

● Receiving the University’s highest score in sustainability (95 out of 100 possible points) to date from The Princeton Review’s Best Colleges 2021 Edition, with the University of Arizona being named as a Best College. We were also listed as one of the leading schools for renewable energy in Environment America’s Top Colleges for Renewable Energy 2020.

● Establishing a $1.25M Utility Modification Revolving Fund to provide internal capital for high-performance projects that result in avoided costs, which in turn supports additional projects through its revolving mechanism.
• Setting the University’s first-ever climate goals in the Strategic Plan and committing us to achieve climate neutrality by 2040 or earlier.

• Completing the ENR2 Rooftop Photovoltaic (PV+) Project, in partnership with Students for Sustainability (SFS) and other campus entities, which combines green space with solar technology to support the institution’s missions in teaching, student engagement, and research as well as its GHG reduction goals.

• Joining the University Climate Change Coalition (UC3) and securing an influential leadership position for President Robbins on the President’s Climate Leadership Steering Committee.

• Increasing our student workforce tenfold, doubling our full-time staff, and absorbing several campus sustainability programs to reduce redundancies and create a unified sustainability message and legacy under one management framework. This also includes increasing support to SFS and its students, in both advisory and financial capacities.

• Obtaining more than $500,000 in internal and external funding for our innovative projects, including $75,000 from the Kroger Foundation – $25,000 of which we redirected to the Campus Pantry for its operations during summer 2020, and the remainder of which is being used in partnership with the Cooper Center for Environmental Learning and Tucson Village Farm to establish two new compost demonstration sites – and $184,000 from an intergovernmental agreement with the City of Tucson. We are well-versed in managing an array of projects and priorities, and our history demonstrates that we ascribe to a shared-fate ethos of mutual support, respect, and collaboration with campus partners. The continued growth and successes of the Office and campus sustainability initiatives now hinge on greater funding stability.

Finally, the Office of Sustainability believes that students are a critical and often-overlooked piece of the sustainability puzzle, which is why the Office has placed students at the center of all that it does. Including Compost Cats student employees, the Office currently employs 21 students, and through our growing involvement in and unification of efforts across SFS and other organizations on- and off-campus, the Office reaches hundreds more every semester.

As such, the Office of Sustainability intends to maintain the availability of funding for internal and student/campus partner initiatives while applying a more informed framework and metrics aligned with the University’s Sustainability & Climate Action Plan and in collaboration with the new Student Advisory Board. In this way, the Office will continue the empowerment of these passionate student changemakers and deepen the legacy they are able to leave behind, while accelerating the University’s goals at the same time.

**Conclusion**

This proposed reallocation of resources and the creation of the new Student Advisory Board for the Office of Sustainability will strengthen existing sustainability projects and programs, while accelerating progress towards meeting the University’s climate neutrality and broader sustainability goals as outlined in the Strategic Plan. The Student Advisory Board will also give students greater voice in the University’s long-term sustainability and climate efforts through the Office.

Please direct questions about this proposal to Trevor Ledbetter, Director for the Office of Sustainability at tledbetter@arizona.edu. Please direct questions specific to the Green Fund to Julia Rudnick at Rudnick1@arizona.edu.
In an effort to enhance transparency, the following information was provided by the Office of Sustainability and is described as a suggested breakdown of the funding reallocation.

- **FY 2022 - $266,500**
  - One new Associate Director staff position to support the development and implementation of the University’s first-ever Sustainability & Climate Action Plan and Resiliency Plan, as well as to spearhead high-level reporting and communication efforts, including campus sustainability educational initiatives, and lead adaptive management processes. This position will also support the targeted improvement of campus sustainability metrics that enable the University to meet its sustainability and climate neutrality goals, while elevating our national and global ratings and rankings.
    - $108,000 (salary + ERE)
  - One new Sustainability & Social Justice Coordinator staff position to support the integration of social justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion best practices into the Office’s projects, programs, and operations. This position would support the Office of Sustainability as well as the Division of Business Affairs to ensure that all units are receiving crucial social justice and cultural sensitivity training and information. Social justice is a high priority for the Office of Sustainability staff, student workers, our partners across campus, and the UArizona student body.
    - $67,000 (salary + ERE)
  - Support for approximately 10 existing grant-funded student employees to continue their essential project and program assistance.
    - $55,000
  - Support for the development of the Sustainability & Climate Action Plan and a corresponding task force of faculty, staff, and students to provide guidance, expertise, and to liaise with the campus and community for feedback at each stage of the planning and implementation processes.
    - $21,500
  - Support for two student co-directors within Students for Sustainability. ASUA has indicated an intention to decrease funding for all student program directors in FY 2022, reducing the number of co-directors managing SFS from three to one. The Office serves in an advisory capacity to SFS and believes it is extremely important to continue investment in this student organization.
    - $15,000

- **FY 2023 - $33,500**
  - Support for internal and student programming and campus partner initiatives to maintain the ability for innovative, impactful sustainability ideas to receive funding, but with greater strategic direction, integration into existing efforts, and improved outcomes.
    - $23,500
  - Support for needs specifically identified within the Sustainability & Climate Action Plan that measurably advance the institution’s sustainability and/or carbon neutrality goals.
    - $10,000

- **FY 2024 - $100,000**
- Support for campus-wide Green Office and Green Lab programs, as well as highly requested Green Orientation educational efforts for all new UArizona students and other pro-environmental behavior campaigns on campus.
  - $50,000
- Support for needs specifically identified within the Sustainability & Climate Action Plan, as described above.
  - $30,000
- Support for internal and student programming and campus partner initiatives, as described above.
  - $20,000