



U.S. Department  
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**Federal Transit  
Administration**

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# NINE STEPS TO STARTING A SUCCESSFUL Environmental and Sustainability Management System



**FTA ESMS RESOURCE SERIES**

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**Building an Environmental and Sustainability Management System (ESMS) can be a daunting endeavor, but it need not be. Taken in steps, it is a journey that can be successful for any organization. This document summarizes the steps that are important for building a strong foundation needed for the successful development of an effective environmental and sustainability management system.**

## **STEP 1: Identifying Benefits, Goals, Scope and Plan of Implementing an ESMS**

The first step in ESMS planning is to determine why and how your organization can benefit from an ESMS.

### **Identify the benefits of an ESMS**

The potential benefits to your organization need to be identified and discussed. Consider benefits at varying levels – organization-wide, facility specific, issue specific, etc. – including cost savings, operational efficiency, improved morale, energized highly trained/qualified employees, improved relationships with customers and the public, as well as reduced environmental compliance issues. This evaluation should result in identifying how these benefits align or can be merged with other organization initiatives.

[CLICK FOR EXAMPLES OF ESMS BENEFITS](#)

In addition, benefits associated with the implementation of an ESMS can enhance other initiatives such as sustainable infrastructure programs through [ENVISION](#) or the [APTA](#) sustainability rating.

### **Determine the organizational goals**

Identify goals based on your organization’s strategic plan. What can your organization accomplish using an ESMS? Examples of goals include:

- Reduce environmental compliance risk
- Increase employee training
- Reduce operational costs
- Promote innovation throughout the organization to improve ridership accessibility
- Promote reduction alternatives in all forms of energy/fuel use

Determine if the goals align with the benefits of having an ESMS by analyzing and evaluating the goals with the strategic direction of the organization.



## STEP 2: Management Commitment and Support

### **Define the scope of activities that are going to be part of the ESMS**

It is very important to determine the boundaries and applicability of the desired ESMS scope – the processes, the number of facilities, the programs, the impact of those interested in your scope, e.g., staff, contractors, regulatory bodies, the community, and suppliers.

### **Develop a preliminary implementation plan**

Once goals and a scope have been identified, a detailed implementation plan should be developed that includes tasks to be achieved, timeframes in which to achieve them (a schedule), responsible personnel, and risks.

Consider using a formal process to guide your efforts such as ISO 14001:2015 which can be found at <https://www.iso.org/publication/PUB100371.html>. The ISO 14001:2015 process may be used with or without pursuing ISO certification. FTA also recommends consideration of the Virginia Tech ESMS Institute, which may be reviewed at <http://www.cpe.vt.edu/esms/>.

### **Gain top management support of the system**

One of the most critical steps in the planning process is gaining top management's commitment to support ESMS development and implementation.

### **Explain and communicate the benefits of an ESMS to management**

Management must fully understand the benefits of an ESMS, as identified in Step 1, and the level of effort it will take to put an ESMS in place.

### **Align the ESMS goals with the organization's mission/vision**

Management needs to make sure that the goals for the ESMS are clear and align with the organizational goals. Examples of aligned goals include:

- Fleet Services is tasked with reducing the **City's carbon footprint** and by working with other staff in the Sustainability Division, employees are exploring the **implementation of alternative fuels, such as electric, compressed natural gas, and biofuels.**
- Development and implementation of an ESMS integrated throughout the Authority is a logical progression **to create a healthier and more livable environment for its employees and customers** while taking steps **to reduce pollution and continually improve its environmental footprint on the region.**

**RELATED INFORMATION ON ALIGNING ESMS WITH SUSTAINABILITY GOALS**



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## STEP 3: Implementation Team

### **Select a cross functional team**

A team with representatives from key organizational functions (operations, finance and budget control, environmental, senior management, procurement, personnel, design and development, operations, facilities, health and safety) can best identify and assess issues, opportunities, and existing processes of the organization as a whole. Participation on the team promotes a sense of commitment to, and "ownership" of, the ESMS among the members and fosters acceptance throughout the agency.

### **Identify qualified representatives who can think strategically and tactically**

The representatives (champions) selected should have the authority to make decisions, a good understanding of the organization, a thorough knowledge of their respective operations or responsibilities, and project management skills. The team needs to consist of personnel who can thoroughly assess issues, creatively identify solutions, and communicate well.

### **Ensure team has the resources necessary to execute the plan**

It is important to communicate needs and expectations regarding resources early in the process and often along the way. This includes senior management or board commitment of resources. Resources to be considered include time, money, knowledge, and people. Members of the team should be trained on ESMS program activities and requirements.

**TRANSIT SPECIFIC ESMS TRAINING AVAILABLE THROUGH FTA'S ON LINE ESMS COURSE**

# 4

## STEP 4: Team Kick-Off Meeting to Develop the ESMS

**During the kick-off meeting** the team should define objectives, initial steps and flesh out the implementation plan (from Step 1, pg. 3). This can be successfully accomplished by defining responsibilities and authorities of each team member as well as determining tasks, due dates, and associated risks.

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## STEP 5: Assess Status – Gap Review

**The gap review or analysis** assesses your organization's current status against the goals and objectives of your ESMS. This should include your organization's structure, training programs, standard operating procedures, policies, and impacts on the environment. By comparing your organization's alignment with the ESMS goals and objectives you will be able to better perform the next steps such as establishing a budget and the schedule for implementation within your whole organization. For areas where goals and objectives are already met, fewer resources will need to be allocated or scheduled for that operation except where coordination needs to be ensured.



# 6

**STEP 6:  
Establish a  
Budget and  
Schedule**

## Using the results of the gap review:

- **Refine the implementation plan by prioritizing efforts and tasks specific to your organization's status.** Highlight key actions that include responsible parties, resources, and timing of activities.
- **Develop a schedule.** Your team will need to refine the initial timeline and develop a clear schedule or plan to carry out the many tasks or activities required to implement your ESMS.
- **Develop and identify a budget to support implementation and to accomplish the tasks outlined in your final schedule or plan.** Your budget will be affected by the physical location, size, and complexity of your operation(s).

**SOME INDICATORS THAT CAN AFFECT COST (PERSON HOURS)  
ARE PROVIDED IN THE FTA SUMMARY REPORTS**

See individual organization reports contained in documents in ESMS Institute Rounds 1–5.

# 7

**STEP 7:  
Identify and  
Commit  
Resources**

## Seek approval of the schedule and the budget

Once your team has established the budget, schedule, and plan, you will need to obtain top management's approval.

## Ask management to communicate the commitment across the organization

To gain buy-in from the employee group, top management needs to show that they support the plan and are committed to developing a successful ESMS. For example, leadership can express commitment to Environmental Policy, Mission, and Vision statements, as well as highlight comments by executive leadership in organization communications and documents (e.g., newsletters, websites, intranet).

**EXAMPLES OF COMMITMENTS MAY BE SEEN IN THE TRANSIT AGENCY DOCUMENTS  
FOR THE VIRGINIA TECH INSTITUTE ROUNDS 1-5**

## Identify resources outside of your organization

As you develop your program, leverage your current team and organizational resources to identify other funding/grant opportunities from organizations such as trade associations, granting agencies, as well as FTA.

## Plan and execute an organization-wide kick-off meeting including all employees and contractors

This is typically done at an "all-hands meeting" followed by individual department meetings to further refine the nature of responsibilities within that department and to explain the what and why of an ESMS. You should announce a start date when your program activities will begin based on the goals of your ESMS as well as your action plans to meet those goals.



## STEP 8: Involve Employees and Contractors

**To involve employees and contractors** begin with existing communication channels to educate employees and contractors about your ESMS and involve them in the process. Employees and contractors may be particularly adept in suggesting changes to standard operating procedures that will improve efficiency, reduce waste, increase safety and save money.

**It is important to promote ownership for employees and contractors.** Methods include:

- Educating personnel on their role in implementing the ESMS
- Getting input from constituents regarding the ESMS
- Involving both groups in the development and refinement of the ESMS
- Creating ownership and responsibility throughout the development process

## STEP 9: Develop a Tracking and Communication Plan

### **Initiate a method to track and communicate progress within your ESMS**

Ensure that the process for tracking your ESMS (goals, objectives, tasks, etc) is well developed and documented. You will need to ensure that your tracking process for your goals and objectives is timely and accurate. Check frequently with those responsible for tracking to ensure that there are no problems with implementation or reporting, especially at start-up. As the efforts continue, focus on continuing support or modify your program activities to address deficiencies.

### **Going forward**

Information on the progress of your ESMS should be communicated to senior management during management review, and to your employees and contractors so that all can “see” the results of these efforts. The results can be communicated internally via meetings, message boards, intranet, newsletters. Leverage the internet and organizational website for external communications.

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION MAY BE FOUND AT:**

- [FTA ESMS Online Course](#)
- [FTA Website](#)
- [FTA Sustainability](#)
- [EPA website](#)
- [ISO: Introduction to ISO 14001:2015](#)
- [APTA Sustainability](#)
- [ESMS: Center for Environmental Excellence by AASHTO](#)
- [VT Institute Website](#)
- [American Society of Civil Engineers](#)
- [Institute for Sustainable Infrastructure](#)

