NACUFS SUSTAINABILITY AWARDS

2027 Categories

Carbon Neutrality

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion/Social Justice

Sustainable Procurement

Waste Reduction

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Sustainability Awards

The NACUFS Sustainability Awards honor leadership in advancing environmentally and socially responsible practices within campus dining. They recognize member programs that demonstrate meaningful progress in sustainable procurement, diversity, equity and inclusion, carbon neutrality, and waste reduction.

Previous Award Winners

Browse the 2026 Awards Gallery to see the winning submissions from last year and gather inspiration for your award entry. The gallery can be found at www.NACUFS.org/membership/awards-gallery-2026 or by scanning the QR code to the right.

Category Descriptions

1. Carbon Neutrality

1. Awarded to operations that place a high value on reducing their carbon footprint and working toward carbon neutrality. Programs that win this award will emphasize purchasing policies that avoid deforestation and favor regenerative agriculture, educating customers on how to reduce the carbon load of their meals, and integrating their efforts with campus-wide climate action programs. This category places a high value on outreach and education as the impact of carbon neutrality is often measured through changes in consumer behavior.

2. Diversity, Equity & Inclusion/Social Justice

   Awarded to operations that place high importance on their impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and social justice. Elements of the programs that win this award could include staff DEI training programs, supplier expectations and purchasing policies, consideration of business types purchased from, development of programs to create more inclusive environments, collaborations with campus groups, and education and outreach to students and the campus community.

1. Sustainable Procurement

   Awarded to operations with compelling and comprehensive sustainable procurement programs. This includes, but is not limited to, programs with an emphasis on local sourcing, animal welfare, sustainable seafood, carbon footprint, and social equity.

2. Waste Reduction

   Awarded to operations with extensive waste reduction plans, for both front- and back-of-house as well as regarding suppliers and procurement. Programs that win this award will place an emphasis on reducing single-use disposables, recycling and composting, diverting waste, collecting data on waste production, and educating consumers on the importance of reducing all waste, including food and other dining related items.

3. Grand Prize

   Awarded to the sustainability program with the overall highest impact among the previous four categories.

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Contest Rules

1. The awards program is only open to NACUFS institutional members in good standing. Non-members interested in submitting an entry must first become a member.
2. Sustainability initiatives/programs entered for judging must have occurred between January 1, 2026, and December 31, 2026.
3. Applicants can enter a submission in multiple categories, but only one entry per category may be submitted, as each submission should encapsulate all elements of the initiative on campus.
4. All entries must be received by **March 31, 2027**. Entries received after the deadline will not be considered.
5. Combined essay answers are limited to 2,000 words. Each individual essay is limited to 500 words.
6. All entry materials must be designed and produced by the institution entering the contest. Entries cannot be company-wide sustainability promotions or concepts that are used at multiple campuses or institutions as a company program.
7. NACUFS expects that the use of AI will not overshadow a submission's authenticity. Judges evaluate actual outcomes, measurable results, challenges encountered, lessons learned, and institutional impact. The strongest award submissions provide specific examples and evidence rather than generic narratives.
8. Please upload all supporting materials (photos, graphics, videos, other documents) with a file name that clearly describes what part of the submission they refer to (e.g., Marketing-socials-1, or OverallImpact-StudentResponse-3).
9. Before final submission, organizations should ensure that 1) all links function properly; 2) videos are accessible, 3) attachments are uploaded with a file name that includes the criteria category, and 4) all required materials are included with the submission. Incomplete entries may be disqualified.
10. The decisions of the judges are final.
11. All participants will be notified of the results by email following the completion of the judging.
12. All gold, silver, and bronze winners will be displayed at the NACUFS National Conference where the Grand Prize winner will be announced.
13. By entering, permission is thereby given to NACUFS to publish and/or use in any way the material so submitted.
14. All entries must be submitted online via the NACUFS Awards portal.

Supporting Materials

Applicants may upload a maximum of 20 collateral pieces as support documentation with each entry. This might include examples of posters, brochures, screenshots of web pages, menus, published articles, white papers, photographs, and links to video/photo sharing websites. If an entry uses materials that could be subject to copyright and/or trademark protections, the entrant institution should consult with the entrant's legal counsel or appropriate institutional office as to whether written permission from each copyright and/or trademark owner is required. If written permission is required for the purposes reflected in the entry, a copy of each such written permission must be submitted to NACUFS and such written permission shall also be provided for further publication and use by NACUFS.

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Carbon Neutrality

Description

Awarded to operations that place a high value on reducing their carbon footprint and working toward carbon neutrality. Programs that win this award will emphasize purchasing policies that avoid deforestation and favor regenerative agriculture, educating customers on how to reduce the carbon load of their meals, and integrating their efforts with campus-wide climate action programs. This category places a high value on outreach and education as the impact of carbon neutrality is often measured through changes in consumer behavior.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Overall Impact of Initiative or Program	Evidence that the initiative had an overall positive impact. (For example, did you increase your sustainable procurement?) Share any metrics relevant to supporting your progress, such as year-over-year changes. (10 points)	30
	Evidence that the initiative was environmentally sustainable. (10 points)	
	Evidence that the initiative was socially responsible. (10 points)	
Creativity and Innovation	Creativity and innovation were used in the deployment of the initiative. (5 points)	15
	Creativity and innovation were used to involve campus and/or greater community in initiative. (5 points)	
	Students were involved in the program or initiative. (5 points)	
Low Start-Up Resource Costs/High Return	Include financial return on investment (ROI) in comparison to start-up resource cost (show comparison figures). (5 points)	10
	Project risk: through review and revision, identified project risks were managed and minimized. (5 points)	
Applicability of Initiative	Can the operation be replicated in similar operations, or inspire like-minded ideas in operations of all types? (15 points)	15
Effectiveness of Measurement	The extent to which specific quantitative metrics were recorded that support the effectiveness of the initiative (such as graphs, charts, survey results and research results). (10 points)	10

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Carbon Neutrality

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Education, Outreach, and Marketing/ Communications	Outreach was conducted to share information about the program with students and campus community, local media, etc. (5 points)	20
	Overall educational impact of the program. Did the program explain why it was important to sustainability? (10 points)	
	How were students engaged in the design or implementation of the program? (5 points)	
Total Points Possible		100

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion/Social Justice

Description

Awarded to operations that place high importance on their impact on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives and social justice. Elements of the programs that win this award could include staff DEI training programs, supplier expectations and purchasing policies, consideration of business types purchased from, development of programs to create more inclusive environments, collaborations with campus groups, and education and outreach to students, staff, and the wider campus community.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Overall Impact of Initiative or Program	Evidence that the initiative had an overall positive impact. (For example, did you increase your sustainable procurement?) Share any metrics relevant to supporting your progress, such as year-over-year changes. (10 points)	30
	Evidence that the initiative was environmentally sustainable. (10 points)	
	Evidence that the initiative was socially responsible. (10 points)	
Creativity and Innovation	Creativity and innovation were used in the deployment of the initiative. (5 points)	15
	Creativity and innovation were used to involve campus and/or greater community in initiative. (5 points)	
	Students were involved in the program or initiative. (5 points)	
Low Start-Up Resource Costs/High Return	Include financial return on investment (ROI) in comparison to start-up resource cost (show comparison figures). (5 points)	10
	Project risk: through review and revision, identified project risks were managed and minimized. (5 points)	
Applicability of Initiative	Can the operation be replicated in similar operations, or inspire like-minded ideas in operations of all types? (15 points)	15
Effectiveness of Measurement	The extent to which specific quantitative metrics were recorded that support the effectiveness of the initiative (such as graphs, charts, survey results and research results). (10 points)	10

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Diversity, Equity and Inclusion/Social Justice

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Education, Outreach, and Marketing/ Communications	Outreach was conducted to share information about the program with students and campus community, local media, etc. (5 points)	20
	Overall educational impact of the program. Did the program explain why it was important to sustainability? (10 points)	
	How were students engaged in the design or implementation of the program? (5 points)	
Total Points Possible		100

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Sustainable Procurement

Description

Awarded to operations with compelling and comprehensive sustainable procurement programs. This includes, but is not limited to, programs with an emphasis on local sourcing, animal welfare, sustainable seafood, carbon footprint, and social equity.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Overall Impact of Initiative or Program	Evidence that the initiative had an overall positive impact. (For example, did you increase your sustainable procurement?) Share any metrics relevant to supporting your progress, such as year-over-year changes. (10 points)	30
	Evidence that the initiative was environmentally sustainable. (10 points)	
	Evidence that the initiative was socially responsible. (10 points)	
Creativity and Innovation	Creativity and innovation were used in the deployment of the initiative. (5 points)	15
	Creativity and innovation were used to involve campus and/or greater community in initiative. (5 points)	
	Students were involved in the program or initiative. (5 points)	
Low Start-Up Resource Costs/High Return	Include financial return on investment (ROI) in comparison to start-up resource cost (show comparison figures). (5 points)	10
	Project risk: through review and revision, identified project risks were managed and minimized. (5 points)	
Applicability of Initiative	Can the operation be replicated in similar operations, or inspire like-minded ideas in operations of all types? (15 points)	15
Effectiveness of Measurement	The extent to which specific quantitative metrics were recorded that support the effectiveness of the initiative (such as graphs, charts, survey results and research results). (10 points)	10

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Sustainable Procurement

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Education, Outreach, and Marketing/ Communications	Outreach was conducted to share information about the program with students and campus community, local media, etc. (5 points)	20
	Overall educational impact of the program. Did the program explain why it was important to sustainability? (10 points)	
	How were students engaged in the design or implementation of the program? (5 points)	
Total Points Possible		100

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Waste Reduction

Description

Awarded to operations with extensive waste reduction plans, for both front- and back-of-house as well as regarding suppliers and procurement. Programs that win this award will place an emphasis on reducing single- use disposables, recycling and composting, diverting waste, collecting data on waste production, and educating consumers on the importance of reducing all waste, including food and other dining related items.

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Overall Impact of Initiative or Program	Evidence that the initiative had an overall positive impact. (For example, did you increase your sustainable procurement?) Share any metrics relevant to supporting your progress, such as year-over-year changes. (10 points)	30
	Evidence that the initiative was environmentally sustainable. (10 points)	
	Evidence that the initiative was socially responsible. (10 points)	
Creativity and Innovation	Creativity and innovation were used in the deployment of the initiative. (5 points)	15
	Creativity and innovation were used to involve campus and/or greater community in initiative. (5 points)	
	Students were involved in the program or initiative. (5 points)	
Low Start-Up Resource Costs/High Return	Include financial return on investment (ROI) in comparison to start-up resource cost (show comparison figures). (5 points)	10
	Project risk: through review and revision, identified project risks were managed and minimized. (5 points)	
Applicability of Initiative	Can the operation be replicated in similar operations, or inspire like-minded ideas in operations of all types? (15 points)	15
Effectiveness of Measurement	The extent to which specific quantitative metrics were recorded that support the effectiveness of the initiative (such as graphs, charts, survey results and research results). (10 points)	10

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Waste Reduction

Evaluation Structure Continued

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Education, Outreach, and Marketing/ Communications	Outreach was conducted to share information about the program with students and campus community, local media, etc. (5 points)	20
	Overall educational impact of the program. Did the program explain why it was important to sustainability? (10 points)	
	How were students engaged in the design or implementation of the program? (5 points)	
Total Points Possible		100

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Grand Prize

Description

Recognizes the sustainability program with the greatest overall impact across the four award categories.

Entries will first be evaluated using the criteria for their respective categories. The highest-scoring entries will then be assessed using the following additional criteria:

Evaluation Structure

Category	Criteria for Evaluation	Points Possible
Overall Impact	Did the program inspire guests to take on more sustainable initiatives and seek out more information about why it is important?	10
Forward Thinking	Is the program looking to the future and ahead of its time?	10
Achievability	Can other campuses be inspired by this program to create something within their own operation?	10
Affordability	How did this initiative meet its goal while also focusing on keeping food/meal plans affordable for students?	10
Total Points Possible		40

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Sustainability Awards Classification Matrix

NACUFS will categorize your submission based on our current data using the Sustainability Awards Classification Matrix. If you'd like to update your data or ensure its accuracy, please contact membership@NACUFS.org.

