THE ECOBIZ STUDENT HANDBOOK 2.0

"How Young Entrepreneurs Can Build a More Sustainable Business World"







CONTENTS

1 What is EcoBiz? - 3

2 How to Use This Handbook: A Roadmap - 5

3 Preface - 7

4 What Is a Sustainable Business? - 7

5 Why Sustainability in Business Matters - 9

6 Finding a Sustainable Business Idea - 10

CONTENTS

7 Designing a Sustainable Business Model - 12

8 Measuring Impact - 19

9 Marketing Your Sustainable Business - 21

10 Funding Sustainable Ventures as Youth - 22

11 Get Involved With EcoBiz - 23



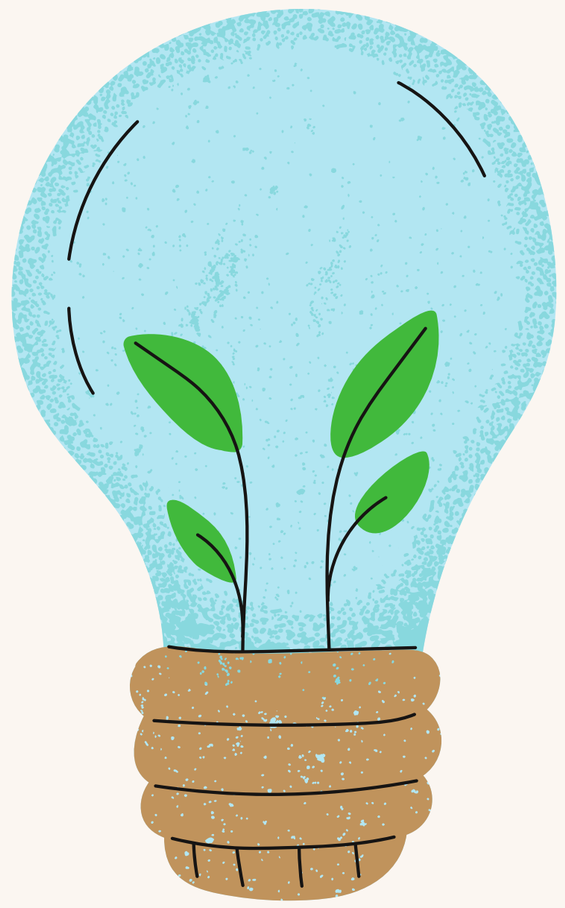




#1 What is EcoBiz?



EcoBiz is a New York City-based, student-led nonprofit dedicated to advancing sustainable business practices and empowering the next generation of ethical entrepreneurs. Founded by high school students, EcoBiz was created to bridge the gap between traditional business education and the growing need for environmental and social responsibility in today's economy.



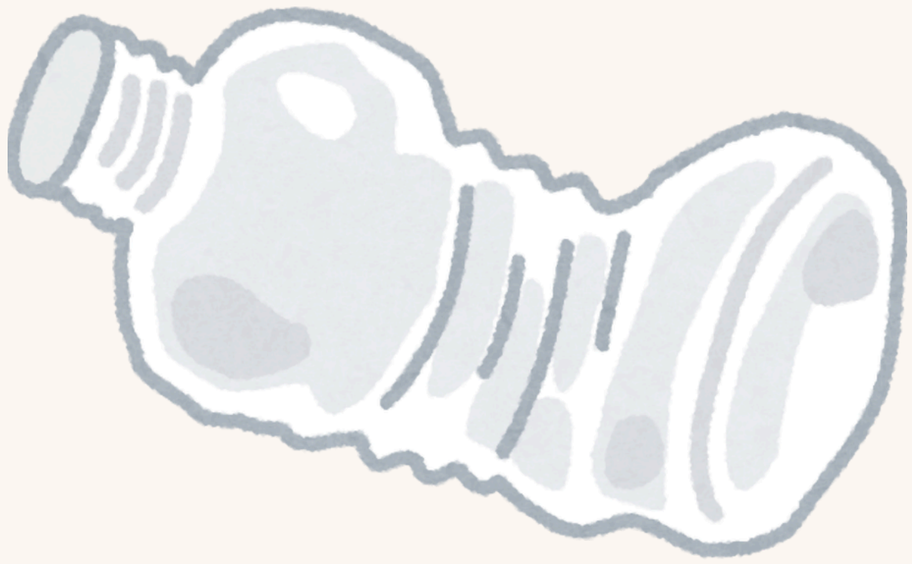
Our mission is to support youth-led and small businesses pursuing sustainability and educate students on sustainable business practices. We believe that profitability and responsibility are not separate goals, but interconnected pillars of long-term success.

We operate through hands-on education, small business support, student-led entrepreneurship programs, and community partnerships. We also produce educational resources and monthly publications that highlight sustainable businesses and student initiatives while expanding access to sustainability education.





Since being founded in 2024, EcoBiz has grown into a network of over 300 active members, reaching more than 10,000 students through workshops and resources. We've built a network of 30+ partner organizations and businesses, published 20+ newsletters, and collaborated with organizations such as TerraCycle and the Post-Landfill Action Network. Our work has been recognized at the United Nations High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development and United Nations ECOSOC Youth Forum and featured at the New York City Earth Day Festival at Union Square Park, reaching over 100,000 attendees.



EcoBiz exists to prepare students not just to participate in the future of business, but to actively shape it.

2 How To Use This Handbook: A Roadmap

Starting a sustainable business can feel overwhelming, especially as a young entrepreneur with limited resources and experience. However, sustainability doesn't require perfection or major investments from the beginning. The most impactful step is learning how to make thoughtful decisions early and building responsible practices into your business model from the start.

This handbook is designed to guide young entrepreneurs through the process of creating businesses that consider both profitability and impact. Whether you are developing a product or launching a small venture, our goal is to help you understand how everyday choices can influence people and the planet.

A useful approach is to follow these steps:

Step 1: Define your mission and values.

Before creating your business, think about the purpose behind it.

Ask yourself:

- What problem is my business solving?
- How can my product or service create a positive impact?
- What environmental or social values do I want my business to represent?
- How will sustainability influence my decisions?

A strong mission helps guide your choices and ensures that sustainability becomes part of your business identity rather than an afterthought.

Step 2: Build sustainability into your business model.

Consider the environmental and social impact of each stage of your business, including:

- Where your materials come from
- How products are made
- How workers and collaborators are treated
- How much waste your business creates
- How your products are packaged, transported, and used

Young entrepreneurs often have the advantage of starting small, which allows them to experiment with sustainable practices and create responsible systems before their business grows.

#3 Preface

Starting a business with sustainability in mind does not require large budgets or advanced technology. As a student entrepreneur, you are often working with limited resources, which makes early decisions especially important.

The choices you make at the beginning shape how your business treats people, uses materials, and affects the environment. Sustainability is not about perfection. It is about making thoughtful, realistic decisions from the start.





#4 What is a Sustainable Business?

A sustainable business is one that balances making a profit with caring for people and the planet. It goes beyond just earning money; it considers how every decision affects the environment and future generations.

<u>Sustainability in business involves</u>:

- **Environmental responsibility**
    - This means making choices that protect the planet. In other words, this includes using materials that can be recycled or sustainably sourced, reducing energy and water consumption, and limiting pollution throughout production and operations.

- **Social responsibility**
    - This focuses on how your business treats people. Some ways to take responsibility are paying workers fairly, respecting partners, and creating products that benefit customers without causing harm. Social responsibility ensures that everyone involved in the business is treated ethically and that your operations support positive social outcomes instead of pursuing profit at the expense of people or communities.

- **Long-term thinking**
    - This is about looking beyond immediate gains. You should be making decisions that may require more effort or resources, yet prevent harm and create value in the future. Instead of prioritizing short-term profit, sustainable businesses consider how its practices will affect the environment, communities, and the company's own longevity over time.

Overall, a sustainable business is one that doesn't just focus on short-term monetary profits, but rather one that looks ahead to the future and makes responsible choices that create long-term value for the business, people, and the planet.







#5 Why Sustainability in Business Matters

Sustainability in business is about creating systems that last. When businesses make ethical, environmentally conscious decisions, they:

- Protect the environment from harmful practices.
- Build trust with consumers and employees.
- Contribute to a future economy that values responsibility over exploitation.

Young entrepreneurs have a special role to play. Because youth-led ventures often start small, they can set sustainable habits from the very beginning.

Examples include:

- Students creating reusable water bottle brands to reduce plastic waste.
- Teen-run clothing lines using thrifted or recycled materials.
- Youth tech startups designing apps that track and reduce carbon footprints.

By making sustainability part of a business, young entrepreneurs like you can help solve real environmental and social challenges while inspiring others to do the same.





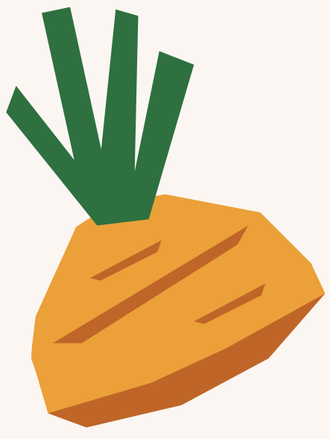


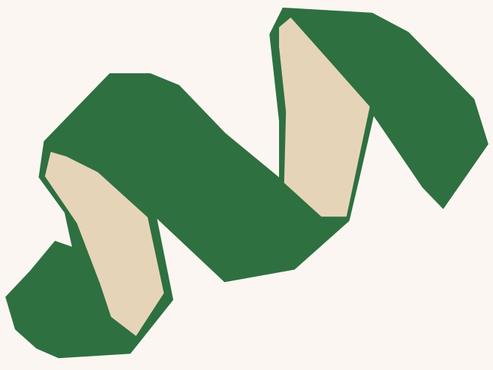
#6 Finding a Sustainable Business Idea

Every successful business begins by solving a problem. Sustainable businesses are no different. Instead of asking, "What can I sell?" start by asking, "What problem can I help solve?" Many of the world's environmental and social challenges create opportunities for innovative business ideas. As a young entrepreneur, you don't need to invent something completely new. Sometimes improving an existing product or making it more sustainable can have just as much of a positive impact.

Start by observing your school, neighborhood, or community. Are there unnecessary single-use plastics? Is food being wasted at local events? Are there products people frequently throw away because they aren't durable or repairable? Small observations can become meaningful business ideas.







When brainstorming, consider questions such as:

- What environmental or social problem do I care about most?
- Who experiences this problem?
- What products or services already exist?
- What skills or interests do I already have that could help solve this problem?

Some examples of sustainable business ideas include:

- Upcycling old clothing or fabric into new products.
- Creating reusable alternatives to disposable household items.
- Developing refillable personal care products.
- Selling products made from recycled or reclaimed materials.
- Building an app that helps users reduce food waste or track their carbon footprint.
- Starting a community composting or recycling service.
- Designing educational resources that teach sustainability to younger students.

Remember that sustainability extends beyond the product itself. Think about how your business will operate from beginning to end. Ask yourself:

- Where will my materials come from?
- How will my product be made?
- How much waste will be created?
- How can my business positively impact my community?



To help with the business model, use online resources to guide your thought process, including but not limited to:

- Business Model Canvas: A visual framework that helps entrepreneurs outline key parts of their business, including customers, value propositions, resources, and revenue streams.
- U.S. Small Business Administration's 10-Step Business Guide
- SCORE Business Plan Template

Overall, make sure your business idea meets these three criteria:

- It solves a real problem, meaning there is a genuine need for your product or service.
- It is sustainable. Your business should consider its environmental and social impact, including how materials are sourced and how waste is managed.
- You can realistically start it. Begin with a smaller version of your idea so you can test it and make improvements over time. Your idea should fit your current budget, resources, and skills.



A strong business idea begins with understanding a problem and creating a solution that can make a meaningful impact.

#7 Designing a Sustainable Business Model

a) Fair Labor and the Environment

Even if your business is small or informal, ethical labor practices still apply. How you treat people at the beginning of your business often determines how responsibly you operate as you grow.

Disclaimer: This is general information and is not intended as legal advice.

How students can approach this:

- Clearly agree on payment or expectations before any work begins.
- Pay collaborators fairly based on time and effort.
- Before work begins, agree in writing on responsibilities, hours, payment, and ownership of the work. Do not assume that a friend, collaborator, or intern may legally work without pay. If someone is acting as an employee, follow applicable wage and youth-employment laws. (In 2026, NYC's general minimum wage is $17 per hour.)

Where to learn fair standards:

- School job boards and student employment listings can help you understand fair pay ranges.
- Nonprofit organizations like the Fair Labor Association provide basic guidelines that apply to small teams.
- A resource to use is:
    - U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics







Why this matters:

- Ethical labor and environmental responsibility are closely connected.
    - When workers are treated fairly, they are more likely to care about how a business operates and the impact it has. Transparent practices reduce reliance on cheap labor models that often depend on environmentally harmful shortcuts.
    - Businesses that value their workers are also more open to feedback, which can lead to better decisions about materials, sourcing, and waste. By building fair labor practices early, student entrepreneurs support a business culture that prioritizes long-term environmental responsibility over short-term cost cutting.
    - Overall, fair treatment builds trust and reduces conflict. People are more likely to support and recommend a business they believe acts responsibly toward both people and the environment.

b) Responsible Sourcing and Production

Sustainable manufacturing starts with choosing materials that reduce waste and limit environmental harm. As a student entrepreneur, you are most likely producing at a small scale, which makes it easier to source responsibly and avoid unnecessary environmental impact.

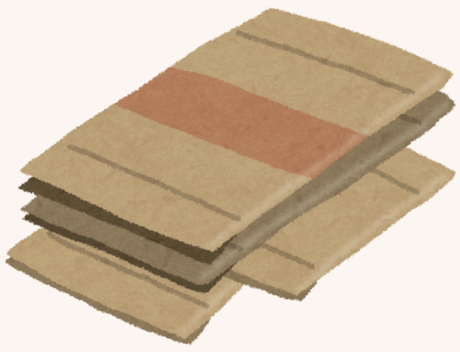


Option 1: Choose Sustainable Materials You Can Access!

Before selecting materials, consider where they come from and what happens after they are used. Many sustainable options are widely available to students and do not require bulk purchasing.

The following options may reduce impact when they are responsibly sourced and appropriate for the product.

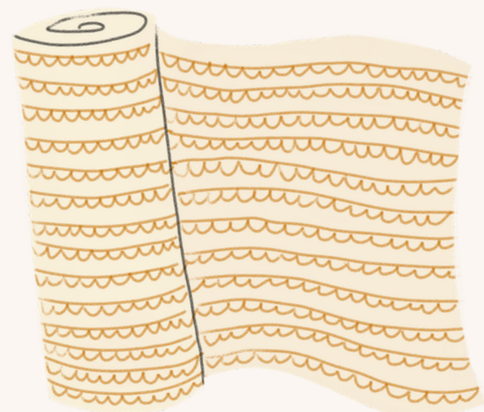
- Recycled paper and cardboard
  - Available through local print shops, office supply stores, and online eco-friendly packaging suppliers.
  - A few places in NYC are:
    - Empire State Cardboard Paper Recycling
    - Scholes Street Recycling
    - Metropolitan Paper Recycling



- Kraft paper
  - Found at craft stores, packaging suppliers, and reuse centers.
  - A few places in NYC are:
    - Big Reuse



- Recycled or thrifted fabric
  - Available at thrift stores, textile reuse centers, and donation-based craft shops.
  - A few places are:
    - Fabscrap
    - Vintage Thrift Shop



- Bamboo products and fiber
  - Found through online small-quantity suppliers and eco-focused retailers.

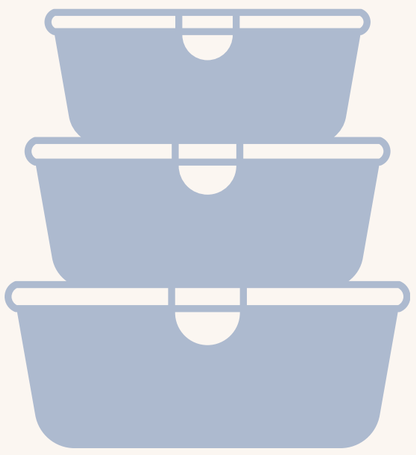


- Glass jars and bottles
  - Available at thrift stores, reuse centers, and through clean, reused containers from local businesses.
  - A place is:
    - Maison Jar
  -



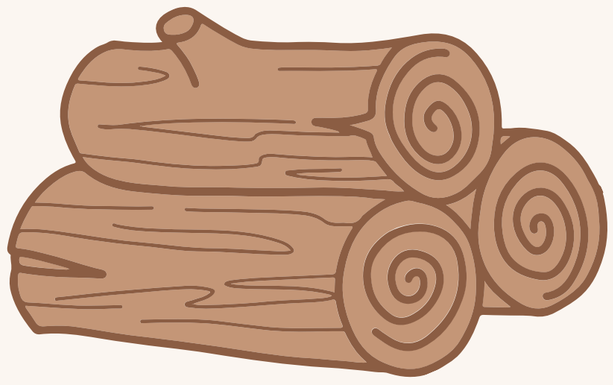
- Recycled plastic containers
  - Available through eco-packaging suppliers that sell post-consumer recycled materials.

- Compostable packaging materials
  - Offered by online suppliers specializing in compostable mailers and bags.
  - A few places are:
    - Paper Mart
    - Eco Enclose



- Wood from reclaimed sources
  - Found at reuse lumber yards, habitat restore stores, and community salvage centers.
  - A few places are:
    - Sawkill Lumber Co.
    - M. Fine Lumber





Option 2: Produce Locally and in Small Batches!

Producing locally is one way for student businesses to reduce environmental impact.



How students can approach this:

- Create products by hand or with simple tools.
- Use school maker spaces, art rooms, or community workshops.
- Work with local makers or printers instead of overseas suppliers.
    - A resource to use is:
        - Maker's Row

Local production can shorten supply chains, simplify communication, and make working conditions easier to evaluate. Compare total material, energy, production, and transportation impacts before choosing a supplier.

c) Ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) means taking responsibility for how your business affects people and the environment. For student entrepreneurs, this is less about public image and more about daily choices that reflect your values.





Step 1: Define your values early!

Before selling anything, decide what your business will prioritize.

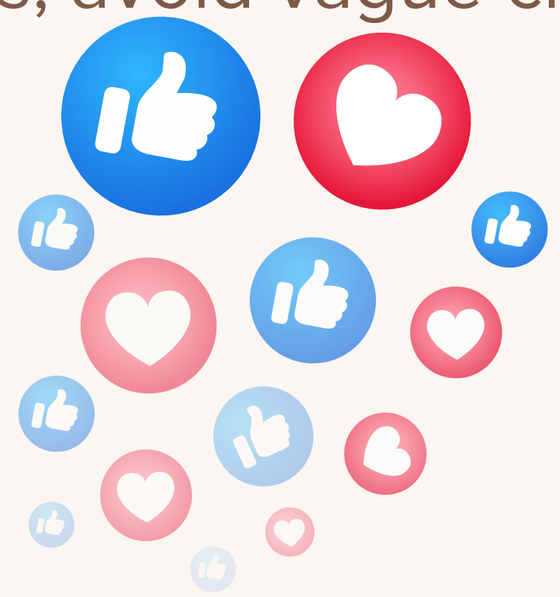
- Write a short statement explaining what your business stands for.
    - This should be your mission statement.
- Include one social goal or one environmental goal that guides decisions.

- Share this statement on your website, social media, or product page.
- Use the Compass's guide, 'How to Develop a Mission Statement,' for additional support: **HOW TO DEVELOP A MISSION STATEMENT**
- Clear values help you make consistent choices and show customers that your business is intentional.

Step 2: Be transparent about your choices!

CSR is not about being perfect. It is about being honest.

- **Explain** where your materials come from in simple language.
- **Acknowledge** limits, such as higher costs or limited access to certain materials.
- **Avoid greenwashing**; in other words, avoid vague claims like "eco-friendly" without explanation.



Try to apply transparency to:

- Product descriptions
- Packaging inserts
- Social media posts

Transparency builds trust and helps prevent misleading environmental claims.





Step 3: Give back at a scale that makes sense!

CSR does not require large donations or partnerships.

- Donate a small portion of profits to a local environmental or social cause.
- Volunteer time or services instead of money.
- Partner with school or community organizations for events or fundraisers.



Start with:

- School clubs and service groups
- Local nonprofits or environmental organizations
- Community cleanups or donation drives
    - NYC Service Park Cleanups



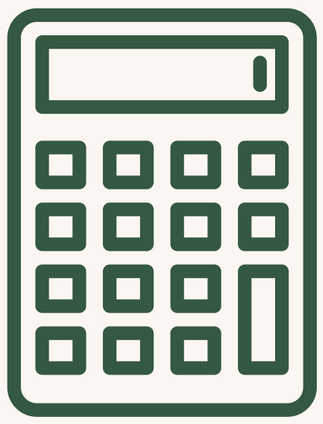
Giving back connects your business to the community and reinforces responsible practices.

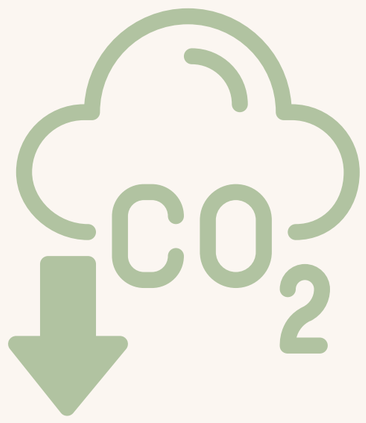


#8 Measuring Impact

Knowing whether your business is truly sustainable requires measurement. Even small ventures can track their impact:

- Carbon footprint: Estimate how much energy your products and operations use. Tools like carbon calculators can help, though note these are rough estimates and not exact.
    - Sustrax carbon calculators
    - Nature.org carbon calculator





Waste reduction metrics: Track how much material you reuse, recycle, or avoid using entirely. Some resources that could help are:

- Metrics for Waste Reduction by the EPA
- ENERGY STAR: Waste Tracking and Management in Commercial Buildings.



Social impact indicators: Monitor volunteer efforts, community engagement, and more. Here is a small guide to help:

- Sopact: Social Impact Metrics: Turning Data into Actionable Insight

It’s also important to know about the Environmental, Social, and Governance—or ESG—categories organizations use to evaluate and communicate responsible practices.

- Environmental: Businesses like yours can analyze their carbon footprint, invest in renewable energy sources, and focus on designing products for durability. Additionally, some choose to utilize frameworks such as the Global Reporting Initiative to maintain accountability, and more.

- Social: Be sure to maintain equity within the workplace on all levels, whether that’s by ensuring fair pay, safe working conditions, a diverse workforce, and by avoiding suppliers that rely on unethical methods such as child labor.

- Governance: This entails having clear responsibilities, accurate records, transparent decisions, privacy and data protection, and legal and ethical compliance.

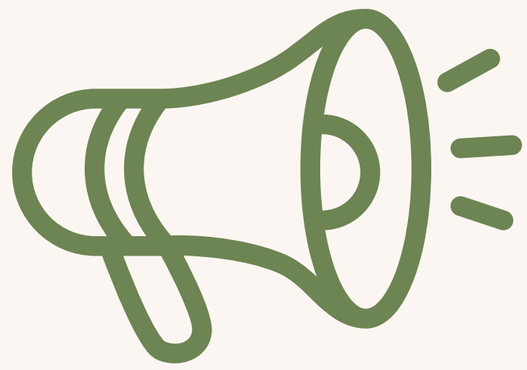
Tracking and reflecting on these metrics can improve your business and also show customers, partners, and future investors that sustainability is a real priority, not just a marketing claim.

9 Marketing Your Sustainable Business

Marketing a sustainable business is about authenticity and education, meaning that your goal is to build trust and show why your choices matter. You can do this by:

- Telling your story: Substantiate material claims and disclose relevant limitations or trade-offs. Explain why you chose recycled materials, local production, or fair labor practices.
- Avoiding greenwashing: Don’t make vague claims about your business without proof and actual impact. Honesty is key—make sure to disclose everything, whether beneficial to you or not, to customers and partners.
- Educating customers: Show how your product contributes to positive change, whether it’s by reducing waste or supporting your workers.
- Engaging your audience: Use social media, packaging, events, or even advertisements to connect with consumers who value sustainability.

Detailed and, most importantly, authentic storytelling strengthens your brand while reinforcing the responsible values at the heart of your business. It helps introduce your brand to a larger audience while promoting the core values of sustainability.



10 Funding Sustainable Ventures as Youth

Even young entrepreneurs like you can access resources to start and grow a sustainable business. Some possible ways to begin are:

- Grants for sustainability: Organizations, schools, local governments, and nonprofits often provide funding for environmentally conscious projects. Make sure to reach out professionally and respectfully.
- Youth entrepreneurship competitions: Many contests reward innovative, socially responsible business ideas. Even if you don’t win first place, competing exposes you to other sustainable business ideas.
- Partnerships with nonprofits or local organizations: Teaming up can provide mentorship, materials, expertise, and resources.

Some useful starting points include:

- SCORE, New York Small Business Development Centers, NYC Business Solutions, and Empire State Development.
- Note that the SBA generally does not provide grants to start or expand ordinary small businesses.
- Local business incubators and student innovation programs
- Environmental clubs or community organizations offering support

Finding funding isn’t just about money—it’s about connecting with mentors and communities that share your values.

11 Get Involved with EcoBiz

Building a more sustainable future requires individual action. With a community of students, entrepreneurs, businesses, and organizations working together toward shared goals, we can create meaningful change over time. EcoBiz is committed to creating a space where young people can learn about sustainable business and collaborate with others who believe that business can be a force for positive environmental and social change.

There are many ways to engage with EcoBiz and stay connected to the sustainable business movement:

Join our community and stay informed.
Subscribe to the EcoBiz newsletter to receive updates on upcoming workshops, opportunities, sustainability resources, student projects, and ways to get involved. Our newsletters explain sustainable-business topics, showcase student and small-business projects, and share relevant opportunities.

Subscribe HERE.







Follow EcoBiz and support our mission.

Follow us on Instagram at @ecobiznyc. Sharing our work helps spread awareness and encourages more students and businesses to explore sustainable practices.



Partner and collaborate with EcoBiz.

Students and small businesses can work with EcoBiz through partnerships, projects, events, research opportunities, and community initiatives.



Explore more resources.

Continue learning beyond this handbook by exploring EcoBiz's additional resources located on our website: https://ecobiznyc.org/

The future of sustainable business depends on the next generation. Whether you are starting a business, supporting sustainable initiatives, or simply learning more about responsible entrepreneurship, your choices matter. Every step toward a more responsible business helps create a healthier future for people and the planet.







Your Next Steps:

- Lower expenses by actively reducing energy, water, and material waste.
- Attract eco-conscious customers, build brand trust, and minimize regulatory risks.
- Implement practical steps like composting, local sourcing, and community partnerships for measurable impact.



Every sustainable business journey begins with small, intentional choices. Progress takes time, but each thoughtful decision can strengthen your venture and contribute to a healthier, more responsible future.

Take action today to build a profitable business that powers a better planet.