



How to develop and communicate a responsible business strategy





What is a strategy?

Strategies come in all shapes and sizes, focused on different areas of an organisation and we're here to strip away the noise and focus on the core. So, let's get to it!

- It's simply a plan of action getting you from A to B. It plans out where the people in your organisation will focus their efforts to achieve key objectives.
- It's the how you'll meet key objectives to achieve your (responsible business) vision/mission over a set period of time.
- It's a roadmap to help you optimise the positive impact you can have on people, places and the planet.

Why have a responsible business strategy?

- It's important to have a shared understanding of how your business is becoming more responsible
- It helps bring people with you along the journey
- Measurable goals can help keep you on track and measure the change
- You can use it to externally show your commitment and answer questions about what you're doing on responsible business

Key stages for developing a responsible business strategy

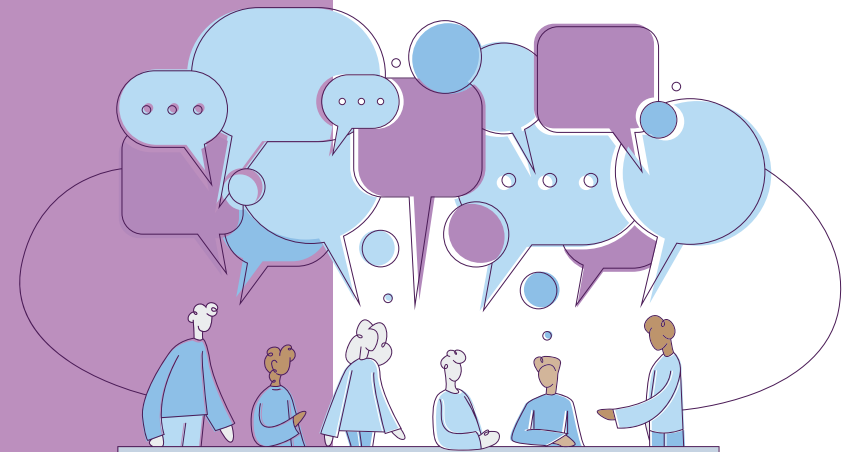


This is the process you should follow to get your responsible business strategy written - keep reading for tips on how to complete each step.

1. Develop an understanding of your baseline

Before you can talk about where you're going, you need to understand where you're currently at on your responsible business journey. Foundations for Responsible Business members can use our 'responsible business health check' as a baseline. Otherwise, gather information on all the work you currently do to be better for your people, communities and the planet.

Take a look at what your current business priorities are. How do they overlap or diverge from your responsible business work? It's important to understand these elements and this'll help you if you ever want to talk about your journey with a stronger narrative.





2. Engage with your stakeholders

Your stakeholders include your employees, your customers, buyers, suppliers – anyone your business interacts with regularly, and they're essential to this process!

When developing a responsible business strategy, it's important for you to understand what your stakeholders consider priorities. It's also a way to communicate that you're doing it and bring them along on the journey.

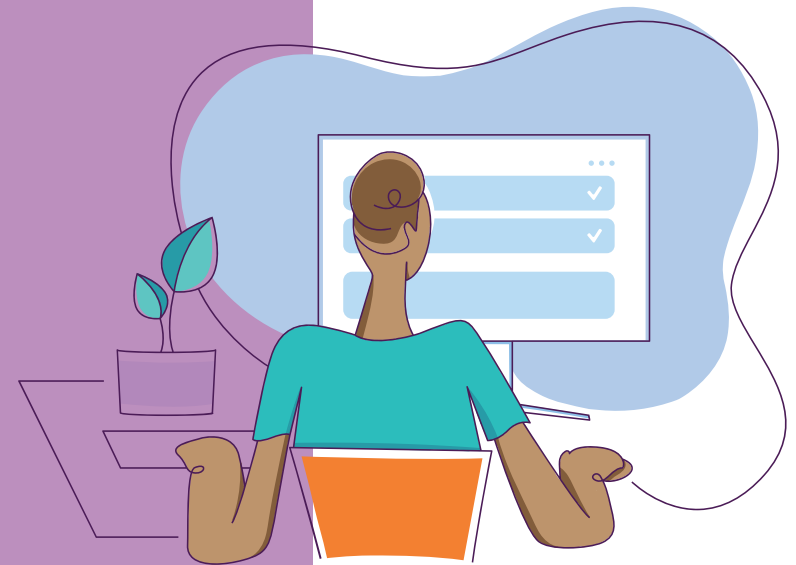
We recommend that when developing a strategy, especially with responsible business strategies – that you co-create it rather than developing it within a small group of senior managers. Bringing a range of people together will make it a more inclusive and transparent process. This is much easier to do as a small business, rather than a larger corporate.

One of the key benefits of engaging with your stakeholders is that it reduces the risk of 'group think', meaning you'll get more ideas which could lead to real innovation.

How to engage with your stakeholders:

- Decide which internal and external stakeholders you're going to contact to help better understand the areas of responsible business you should be focussing on
- Explain what you're doing and why to each of your stakeholders. You may need different language for internal and external stakeholders.

- Design a basic materiality survey (*you can use our handy template of a materiality survey here*) to help understand key priorities and areas for focus
- Analyse the results from the materiality survey, and move to strategy creation





3. Creating the strategy

So you've gathered all the information that you can at this point – now it's time to get thinking. Use the information that you gathered about your baseline and from the materiality assessment, and this is where you need to decide what to prioritise, or not.

Once you have a stronger sense of what areas you're going to focus on, which you're not going to focus on and why, you'll need to pull it all together. The UN's 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a great umbrella to pin your focus areas under. They'll help you align your work with what the UK and other countries are working towards – a better future for all people and the planet.

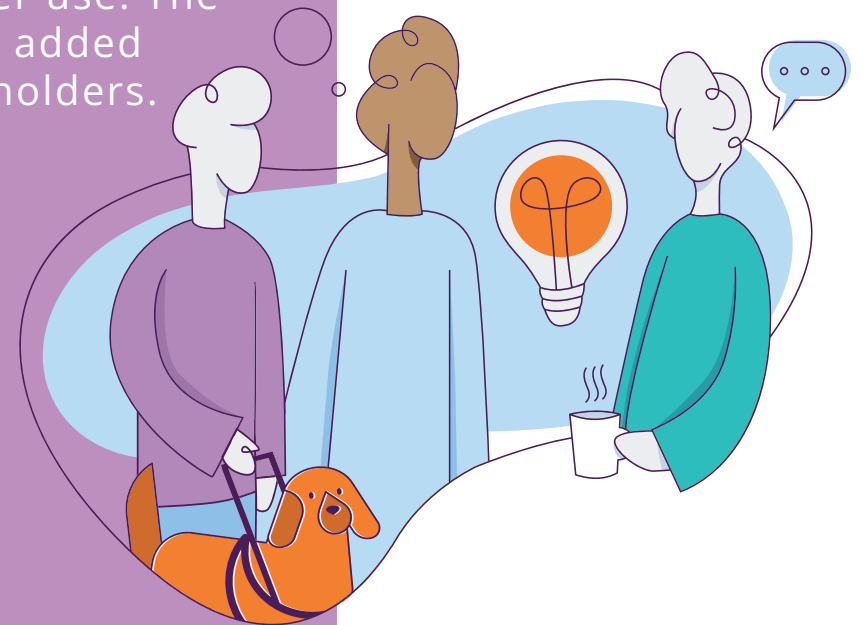
For example, if one of your focus areas is to help diversify the industry and your workforce as both are white-male dominated, and your community work is focused on encouraging more women to enter the workforce – then that contributes to SDG 5 'Gender equality'.

If you've used the materiality assessment tool, then you should have already identified which are the top sustainable development goals you'll be focusing on.

What should you include in your strategy? Here are our suggestions. You can add as much or as little narrative as you'd like, but it should contain:

- Overarching vision/ aim of what you're trying to achieve (the materiality assessment can help you develop one if your business doesn't have one)
- Key focus areas within the strategy, which can be taken from the SDGs (the materiality assessment should help you prioritise these)
- Clear goals of what you're trying to achieve
- Measurable targets with a timeframe
- Governance structure of the strategy (who has overall responsibility)
- Owners of measurable targets
- Check-points so that you can review progress and see if you need to change anything

It's important to make sure that your targets are measurable, as there's no point in having a 'pretty' strategy that you never use. The strategy should be a tool and keep you accountable – the added benefit is using it as an engagement tool with your stakeholders.





4. Reviewing the strategy document

You've finished stage one of your strategy, it's time to get feedback from some of your stakeholders to see what they think of your initial strategy. Review their feedback and make changes where appropriate. Get it to a stage where you'd be happy to share it with someone with completely fresh eyes.

5. Communicating your finished product

With the strategy now developed, you need to embed the responsible business strategy and its goals throughout your organisation. You don't have to overcomplicate it. There isn't one correct way to present your strategy but we recommend that you clearly communicate the goals, who's leading them, the timeframes around them – and never forget to explain the why behind it all!

It may be that you need to create an external version of your strategy – one that's more visually appealing so that you can use it as a communication tool about your business, as well as the responsible business work that you're going to be doing.



Top tips

- You can never do 'too much' engagement. Think little and often with your team.
- Some of our SMEs have used short, two minute videos to talk about a particular piece of the strategy to teams. There are lots of ways to get the message across – you can use emails, newsletters, internal sharing platforms, workshops and regular meetings to communicate.
- Don't forget to break it down into small steps when communicating, so it's easy to understand.



Final thoughts

You may have a strategy or policy in place already that looks at one element of responsible business. You don't need to lose it, the responsible business strategy builds on that work and is your overarching document. You'll have lots of other policies and documents that fall underneath the responsible business work.

Don't forget: There's no point making the effort of developing a strategy for it never to be used, or if you're not willing to make real changes. You want people to feel ownership of the strategy and proud of what your business is doing. A lot of this is created through the process of how you go about developing a responsible business strategy, and commitment from leadership that they want the business to be better.

*Updated in June 2023 by Heart of the City
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