National Sustainability Society 2025 Annual Report

Message from the Chair



NSS Board Chair & President
Dan Brown
University of Washington

As we conclude our first full year as a formal organization, I am incredibly proud of the trajectory the National Sustainability Society (NSS) has established. What began as a vision for a unified sustainability community has rapidly evolved into a powerhouse of transdisciplinary and cross-sector thought and action leaders. This year wasn't just about establishing ourselves; it was about proving the necessity of our mission through tangible growth and expanded influence.

The 2nd annual conference, with the theme of Transformative Change for a Just and Sustainable Future, enabled us to showcase and maintain optimism in the face of geopolitical headwinds. We practiced our values in bringing people together at the conference, and I'm proud of the programming we developed and offered throughout the year. Our efforts treat sustainability as an interventionist science, bridge between academia and the public and private sectors, and empower transformative change.

We've only just begun. I look forward to continued growth and impact.

Dan Brown

NSS President & Board Chair

2025 In Review: Membership

Our membership numbers tell a story of rapid adoption and shared purpose. NSS Membership grew by 40% in 2025 to 940 members.

NSS membership comes from 47 US states and over 500 universities and partner organizations.



Members by Primary Segment, 2025	Count	%
- Academic	485	51.6%
- Non-academic Research	14	1.5%
- Public	48	5.1%
- Private	108	11.5%
- Nonprofit	66	7.0%
- Students	219	23.3%
TOTAL	940	

As part of our growing effort to build an organization that can serve the broad community of leaders, managers, researchers, and students working on sustainability, the Society's conference facilitates knowledge sharing and cross-sector engagement around the science and practice of sustainability.

2025 In Review: Annual Conference



ATTENDANCE

Our 2025 conference was held October 20-22 at the University of Notre Dame in South Bend, Indiana. Our theme for 2025 was **Transformative Change for a Just and Sustainable Future.** We received 390 contributions, accepted 370, and ultimately hosted a conference for 390 attendees, the majority of whom were speakers on panels, in symposia, in spark sessions, presented posters, and/or facilitated a workshop on the overarching theme of transformative change for sustainability.

A goal of NSS is to bring together sustainability scholars and non-academic professionals. At our 2025 conference, 43% of attendees were non-academic professionals or students. In future years, we will continue to work to bridge these sectoral gaps, welcoming representation from non-academic institutions and organizations.

2025 In Review: Annual Conference



CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHT: PLENARY SESSIONS

Professor Lisa Graumlich, professor emeritus, and ordained clergy provided scientific and spiritual insights on the “inner climate crisis.”

During a “Conversation with our Nation’s Deans,” Christopher Boone (Public Policy, University of Southern California) Patricia Culligan, (Engineering, University of Notre Dame), and Joseph Messina (Arts & Sciences, University of Alabama) argued that colleges and universities must integrate sustainability across programs and train students in order to be ethical. This panel was moderated by Nicole Ardoin of Stanford University.

Kathleen McLaughlin, executive vice president and chief sustainability officer, Walmart, Inc. positioned sustainability as a shared value that requires a systems, multi-disciplinary, and expansive problem-solving lens. Catherine Zhu of Egon Zehnder and Tom Reynolds of University of Notre Dame, chaired the discussion.

Laura Rasmussen, professor, University of Denmark and lead author of the 2025 award-winning paper of the Frontiers Planet Prize, shared research on the joint environmental and social benefits of agricultural diversification.

CONFERENCE HIGHLIGHT: WORKSHOPS

Ten 2-hour workshops were offered during the half-day prior to the start of the main conference program for a fee. Workshops addressed themes, tools, and skills applicable to sustainability multidisciplinarity, work, including behavioral and cultural change, educational competencies and frameworks, decarbonization, participatory and collaborative approaches, and the intersection of science with policy and corporate sustainability.

Workshop topics included:

- *Building Ethical and Effective Research Partnerships: Developing Intellectual Humility and Epistemological Fluency for Sustainability* - Nicole Ardoin, Stanford University, and Ryan O'Connor, Stanford University
- *Info Session on Accreditation for Sustainability and Sustainability-Related Degree and Certificate Programs in Higher Education* - Krista Hiser, Sustainability Education Accreditation Commission (SEAC)
- *Harnessing the Power of Rituals for Environmental Education* - Naama Sadan, Stanford University
- *Teaching Sustainable Development: Integrating Theory and Practice* - William C. Clark, Harvey Brooks Research Professor of International Science, Public Policy and Human Development, Harvard Kennedy School & Alicia G. Harley, Senior Research Fellow Sustainability Science Program

2025 In Review: Annual Conference



National Sustainability Society

ANNUAL AWARDS

Growth is also measured by the caliber of work we champion. This year, **the NSS Awards** honored sustainability professionals who are defining the future of our field:

- **Emerging Scholar:** Beth Tellman
- **Annual Achievement:** The Natural Capital Project
- **Innovations in Education:** The Circular Economy Program at the University of Pittsburgh

SUSTAINABILITY IN ACTION

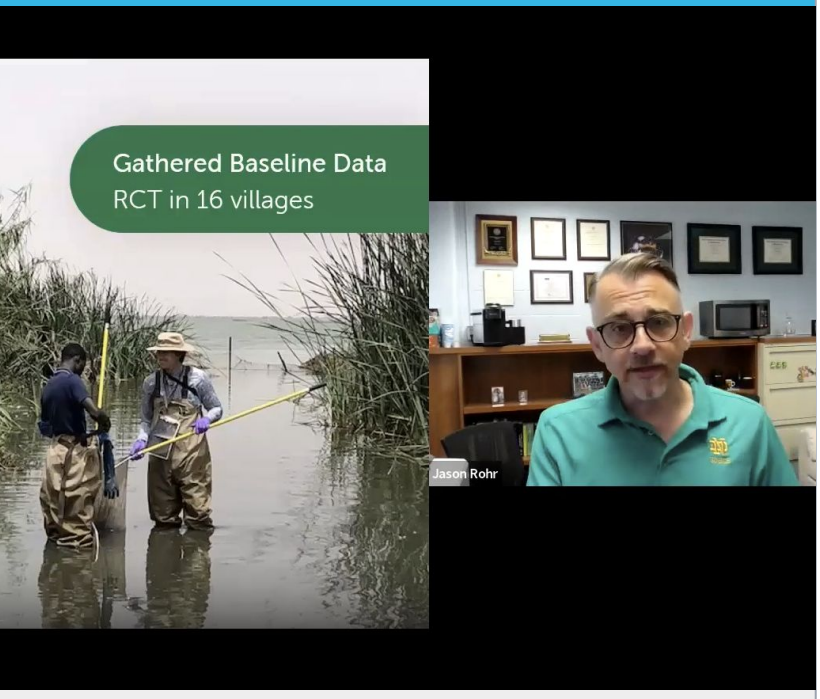
We lived our values by taking every opportunity to practice sustainability. Here are a few of the sustainability actions in our 2nd Annual Conference:

- All vegetarian food provided by local caterers.
- Zero plastic and 100% reusable or compostable servingware.
- Food waste diversion services - fresh food donated after every meal.
- Composting services soured by local business.
- Reusable FSC certified wooden name badges sourced from a local business.

2025 In Review: Annual Conference



2025 In Review:
Virtual Events



In 2025, NSS hosted seven virtual events which were attended by 146 participants.

SUSTAINABILITY-INSPIRED SUCCESSES

A webinar series is designed for members and non-members to share, celebrate, and learn across every sector and discipline. The series launched in 2025 and included interviews with:

- Dr. Jason Rohr, Galla Professor and Chair of the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of Notre Dame
- Disney Petit, LiquiDonate
- Mia Davis, Pact

SUSTAINABILITY JOURNEYS

This series is explores the stories behind sustainability leaders through interviews with researchers, educators, and practitioners working in sustainability

- Julian Agyeman Ph.D. FRSA FRGS, Professor in the Department Urban and Environmental Policy and Planning, a Secondary Professor at The Friedman School of Nutrition Science and Policy, and Fletcher Professor of Rhetoric and Debate, an endowed professorship at Tufts University
- Jeremy Tamanini, founder at Dual Citizen LLC

2025 In Review:
Virtual Events



NSS TOWN HALL

The current policy uncertainty and directions at the federal level profoundly affects all of the sectors within which we do our sustainability work. While our values and goals as an organization have not changed, the context within which we do our work certainly has.

The NSS invited members to join three virtual town hall meetings to share, listen, and discuss the theme of courage, credibility, and collective action within and across our disciplines and sectors.

VIRTUAL CONFERENCE SESSIONS

Recordings of four conference roundtables were made available online to members:

- Planetary Health as a Foundation for Sustainable Well-being
- Shaping your future: Community perspectives on AI education, workforce development, and sustainability
- Sustaining Sustainability in Turbulent Times
- Frontier's Planet Prize: Scientific Consensus in Action

2025 In Review:

Fiscal Sponsorship

SEAC

In 2025, the Sustainability Education Accreditation Commission (SEAC), program of the NSS, extended the Pathways towards Accreditation initiative into its fourth year. The SEAC team designed, piloted, recruited, and facilitated a virtual 5 -week course in collaborative program evaluation in partnership with ASU College of Global Futures.

This course, the Program Directors' Cohort, serves as a qualifying activity to help program directors become familiar with the Guidelines and see if accreditation is a good fit. Out of these participating programs, 5 were selected to advance toward accreditation. The NSS sponsored the PDC and offered free memberships to representatives from the participating programs.

The 5 programs received accounts in Weave Education, and weekly collaborative support to complete a program self study report in Weave, a specialized accreditation software. The site visits will be completed in 2026, and this work will become the basis of SEAC's application to become a recognized programmatic accreditor by the Council on Higher Education.

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