

SUSTAINABLE LEARNING TOOLBOX FOR ORGANISATION



SUSTAINABLE LEARNING
BRIDGING THE GAP



Co-funded by
the European Union

Integrating Non-Formal (NFL) and Sustainability into Organizational Management

Objective of the Toolbox

THIS TOOLBOX IS DESIGNED TO SUPPORT SCHOOLS AND YOUTH ORGANIZATIONS IN:

- UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE OF NON-FORMAL AND INFORMAL LEARNING APPROACHES
- IMPLEMENTING STRATEGIC AND STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN LINE WITH SUSTAINABLE EDUCATION
- RECOGNIZING AND EVALUATING THE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL IMPACTS OF THESE CHANGES.



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1. Why should an organization integrate Non-Formal (NFL) methods?

2. Understanding Sustainability in Education & Youth Work

3. Methodologies for Sustainable Learning

4. Building Skills for Sustainability

5. Recognition and Validation of Learning

6. Organizational Implementation

Annex 1: action steps an organization should follow





1. WHY SHOULD AN ORGANIZATION INTEGRATE NON-FORMAL (NFL) METHODS?



1.1 Why are Non-Formal (NFL) methods important for educational and youth organizations today?

Non-Formal Learning methods respond to realities that formal systems often cannot fully address:

- Rapid social, digital, and environmental change
- Diverse learning needs and backgrounds
- Youth disengagement from traditional education
- Skills gaps (soft skills, civic competences, sustainability mindsets)

NFL methods are:

- Learner-centered rather than curriculum-centered
- Flexible and inclusive, adaptable to different groups
- Experiential, focusing on learning by doing
- Values-based, promoting active citizenship and participation

For youth and educational organizations, NFL supports lifelong learning, empowerment, and social innovation.





1. WHY SHOULD AN ORGANIZATION INTEGRATE NON-FORMAL (NFL) METHODS?



1.2. What does it mean to use (NFL) methods in an organizational context and with internal staff?

Embedding non-formal learning into the daily work of an organization and its staff is a key element. It goes beyond traditional training and formal education, focusing instead on learning through experience, participation, reflection and interaction with others.

By practicing non-formal learning, staff members continually develop their skills, attitudes and understanding. They learn from real situations, from field challenges, from teamwork and from direct contact with beneficiaries. This type of learning strengthens adaptability, creativity and problem-solving skills, which are crucial for responding to social needs and unexpected situations.

Non-formal learning also promotes shared values such as inclusion, active participation, critical thinking, and mutual respect. When organization staff embrace this approach, they not only improve their professional competencies but also embody the values they aim to promote in their work. This creates a more coherent, reflective, and empowered organization.





1. WHY SHOULD AN ORGANIZATION INTEGRATE NON-FORMAL (NFL) METHODS?



1.2. What does it mean to use (NFL) methods in an organizational context and with internal staff?

Valuing and practicing non-formal learning within organization staff helps build stronger teams, encourages lifelong learning, and enhances the overall impact of the organization's mission. It transforms everyday experiences into opportunities for growth, both on a personal and professional level.

Using NFL methods means that the organization:

- Designs learning experiences **outside formal schooling structures**
- Uses **interactive, participatory, and experiential approaches**
- Recognizes learning as a **process**, not only an outcome
- Values **reflection, dialogue, and group dynamics**
- Accepts that learning can be **unplanned, informal, and contextual**

At an organizational level, this implies:

- Shifting from “teaching” to **facilitating learning**
- Embedding learning in **projects, volunteering, mobility, and community work**
- Creating a culture of **reflection, feedback, and continuous improvement**





1. WHY SHOULD AN ORGANIZATION INTEGRATE NON-FORMAL (NFL) METHODS?



1.3 How can (NFL) methods improve an organization's mission, impact and strategy?

NFL methods help organizations in:

Strengthen mission

- Align values with practice (participation, inclusion, democracy)
- Put learners and communities at the center

Increase impact

- Foster transferable skills (critical thinking, teamwork, leadership)
- Reach marginalized or disengaged groups
- Create meaningful, long-lasting learning experiences

Improve strategy

- Encourage innovation and adaptability
- Support cross-sector collaboration
- Provide evidence of social impact beyond certificates or grades





2. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION & YOUTH WORK



2.1. Which aspects of sustainability are most relevant to any youth organization's activities?

Sustainability in youth and education work is multidimensional.

In fact, working on this topic presupposes considering the different dimensions of sustainability:

- Environmental: climate action, biodiversity, resource use
- Social – inclusion, equality, well-being, participation
- Economic – employability, fair work, local development
- Cultural – values, diversity, intergenerational learning
- Institutional: long-term organizational resilience





2. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION & YOUTH WORK



2.2. How can a youth organization's programs contribute to a sustainable future in different disciplines or sectors?

The activities of a youth organization can accompany young people in a profound change linked to sustainability.

Specifically:

- Promote systems thinking and long-term perspectives
- Encourage responsible behavior and active citizenship
- Connect sustainability to daily choices and community action
- Promote interdisciplinary approaches (environment + social justice + economy)
- Support youth-led initiatives and solutions

Sustainability is not a single topic, but a **lens applied across all activities.**





2. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION & YOUTH WORK



2.3. What sustainability topics should a youth organization incorporate into its education programs?

In line with the social and climate changes of the modern era, an organization could propose initiatives related to the following topics:

- Sustainable lifestyles and consumption
- Climate change & environmental protection
- Social justice & human rights
- Digital sustainability and media literacy
- Civic engagement & democracy
- Mental health and wellbeing
- Global citizenship





2. UNDERSTANDING SUSTAINABILITY IN EDUCATION & YOUTH WORK



2.4. How can an organization enable its staff and learners to think and act sustainably?

Real change in an organization starts from within. Therefore, to consider itself "sustainable" an organization must undertake the following actions:

- Use **participatory decision-making**
- Encourage **reflection and critical questioning**
- Provide **real-life challenges and project-based learning**
- Support **experimentation and learning from failure**
- Model **sustainable practices as an organization**
- Invest in **capacity-building for staff and facilitators**





3. METHODOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING



3.1. What are Non-Formal Learning (NFL) methodologies?

Non-formal learning methodologies for youth organizations are participatory, learner-centered, and experiential, focusing on "learning by doing" outside traditional classrooms, using methods like simulation games, role-playing, debates, project-based learning, group dynamics, and facilitated discussions to build life skills (teamwork, leadership, critical thinking) through activities such as volunteering, sports, and community projects, fostering active citizenship and personal growth.

These methods prepare youth for active citizenship and develop crucial "soft skills" like leadership, teamwork, and problem-solving, making learning meaningful and empowering.

Key Methodologies & Techniques

- **Experiential Learning:**
 - Role-Playing & Simulations: Recreating real-life situations (e.g., conflict resolution, political scenarios) for practical skill development.
 - Learning by Doing: Volunteering, community service, or setting up youth-led projects.
 - Group Dynamics: Icebreakers, team-building games, trust exercises.





3. METHODOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING



3.1. What are Non-Formal Learning (NFL) methodologies?

Interactive & Participatory Methods:

- Debates & Discussions: Structured conversations to explore ideas and build critical thinking.
- Case Studies: Analyzing real-world problems.
- Living Library: Young people interact with "human books" (people with unique experiences).

Creative & Arts-Based Approaches:

- Forum Theatre/Theatre of the Oppressed: Using performance to explore social issues.
- Media Literacy Projects: Developing critical thinking about media.

Reflection & Self-Assessment:

- Debriefing Sessions: Facilitated reflection after activities to connect experience to learning.
- Self-Awareness Exercises: Activities to understand personal strengths and values.





3. METHODOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING



3.2. Why are these methodologies effective in fostering youth development?

Methodologies that advance youth development work by creating supportive environments with strong adult relationships, providing skill-building challenges (competence, confidence), promoting belonging (connection, character), and encouraging contribution, all while strengthening resilience and enabling youth to reach their potential as healthy, productive adults by focusing on strengths and growth opportunities.

For examples:

- Build confidence and self-efficacy
- Develop social and emotional skills
- Encourage ownership of learning
- Strengthen motivation and engagement
- Support values formation and identity development
- Prepare young people for real-world complexity





3. METHODOLOGIES FOR SUSTAINABLE LEARNING



3.3. How can a youth organization incorporate the approaches into its activities?

Below you can find a list with some of possible actions an organization can take:

- Redesign activities to include active participation
- Train staff as facilitators rather than instructors
- Integrate reflection into every activity
- Recognize learning outcomes informally (e.g. Youthpass, portfolio)
- Use community projects and partnerships
- Leave space for ideas promoted by young people

[Link to the Training Activities Database \(THE DATABASE\)](#)





4. BUILDING SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY



What key sustainability-related competencies can be developed through the NFL?

Non-Formal Learning (NFL) is especially effective for developing competencies, not just knowledge. Key sustainability-related competencies include:

Systems & Critical Thinking

- Understanding interconnected social, economic, and environmental systems
- Identifying root causes rather than symptoms
- Evaluating long-term impacts of decisions

Social & Civic Competences

- Active citizenship and democratic participation
- Inclusion, equity, and intercultural competence
- Conflict resolution and dialogue

Innovation & Problem-Solving

- Creativity and design thinking
- Co-creation of solutions with communities
- Adaptability and resilience





4. BUILDING SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY



Values & Responsibility

- Ethical reasoning
- Environmental stewardship
- Social responsibility and solidarity
-

Personal & Learning Competences

- Self-awareness and reflection
- Learning-to-learn
- Leadership and initiative

NFL allows these competencies to be developed **through practice**, not just discussion.





4. BUILDING SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY



What is the Sustainable Learning Skills Grid, and how can it guide our educational planning?

The Sustainable Learning Skills Grid is a planning and design tool that:

- Maps key sustainability competencies
- Connects them to learning objectives

Aligns methods, activities, and expected outcomes

How it supports planning:

- Helps define *what skills* an activity develops
- Ensures balance between knowledge, skills, and attitudes
- Makes sustainability learning **intentional and visible**
- Supports coherence across programs and projects
- What is the Sustainable Learning Skills Rubric, and how can it support evaluation?

The Sustainable Learning Skills Rubric is an assessment and reflection tool that:

- Describes progress levels for sustainability competencies
- Supports self-assessment, peer assessment, and facilitator feedback

Makes learning outcomes observable and measurable





4. BUILDING SKILLS FOR SUSTAINABILITY



Why the Sustainable Learning Skills Grid?

Could it motivate schools and youth organizations to look to and know about the forthcoming EU quality jobs act; "Simplify and facilitate the recognition of skills and qualifications across the EU."

This could help put it into context of:

- Lifelong learning
 - having a job
 - Path for/sense of independence for youngsters
- Moves evaluation beyond attendance or outputs
 - Supports formative (learning-oriented) assessment
 - Helps young people articulate what they have learned
 - Provides evidence for recognition and validation

Rubrics typically include:

- Clear competence descriptions
- Development levels (e.g. emerging → developing → confident → advanced)

Qualitative indicators rather than grades





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5. RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF LEARNING



5.1. How can we recognize and validate the sustainability skills young people gain through our programs?

Open Badges are:

- Digital credentials that recognize skills, achievements, or competencies
- Verifiable, portable, and shareable online
- Based on open standards

Each badge includes:

- The issuing organization
- Clear criteria
- Evidence of learning
- Date and validity

Implementation steps:

- Define sustainability competencies and learning outcomes
- Design badge types (e.g. “Sustainability Facilitator”, “Green Project Leader”)
- Set transparent criteria and evidence requirements
- Choose a badge platform





5. RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF LEARNING



5.1. How can we recognize and validate the sustainability skills young people gain through our programs?

- Train staff on assessment and issuing
- What is the organization's role in issuing and managing Open Badges?

The organization acts as:

- Badge issuer (quality and credibility)
- Learning designer (clear outcomes and criteria)
- Assessor (fair and transparent validation)
- Guardian of standards (consistency and ethics)

This requires internal alignment and clear procedures.





5. RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF LEARNING



5.3 What process should young people follow to obtain an Open Badge?

Typical process:

1. Participation in learning activities
2. Reflection on learning outcomes
3. Collection of evidence (projects, portfolios, feedback)
4. Self- or peer-assessment using a rubric
5. Facilitator review and validation
6. Badge issuance and sharing

This process reinforces ownership of learning.





6. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION



6.1 How can an organisation integrate Non-Formal Learning approaches focused on sustainability?

An organization can work at different levels to implement the non-formal learning process internally. Below is a summary of steps an organization can implement:

Strategic level

- Embed sustainability and NFL in mission and values
- Align with long-term organizational goals

Operational level

- Adapt program design and methodologies
- Allocate resources and responsibilities

Cultural level

- Promote learning, reflection, and participation
- Encourage experimentation and innovation





6. ORGANIZATIONAL IMPLEMENTATION



6.2. What structures, training, or resources are needed to scale up sustainability education internally?

Structures

- Clear sustainability and learning strategy
- Internal working groups or coordinators
- Learning and quality frameworks

Training

- Facilitator training in NFL methods
- Sustainability literacy for all staff
- Assessment and validation training

Resources

- Activity databases and toolkits
- Reflection and evaluation tools
- Digital platforms for badges and portfolio





ANNEX 1



Action steps an organization should follow

A. Internal Assessment

- Initial audit: What is your current approach to learning?
- Map existing resource (e.g. staff experienced in facilitation or non-formal methods)

B. Define a Shared Vision

- Conduct participatory meetings with staff, youth, and stakeholders
- Create an internal policy or vision document on transformative and sustainable learning

C. Staff Training and Capacity Building

- Offer training on NFL/IL methods, facilitation, and sustainability
- Introduce reflective tools (e.g. learning journals, debriefing practices)





ANNEX 1



Action steps an organization should follow

D. Revise Governance Structures

- Integrate NFL/IL and sustainability goals into key strategic documents (e.g. vision, curriculum, policies)
- Rethink leadership and decision-making models (towards more inclusive, horizontal models)

E. Embed Sustainability Principles

- Align educational activities with broader sustainability goals (e.g. SDGs, climate action, social inclusion)
- Promote learning that encourages critical thinking and long-term social and environmental impact

