COLLABORATION IN PRACTICE

Corporate Affairs and Sustainability

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Global Compact Network UK

Sustainability Essentials for Core Functions

WHY THIS LANDS ON YOUR DESK

As the corporate affairs function, you're measured on reputation, stakeholder trust, policy outcomes, and how well the company handles scrutiny. Sustainability now factors into all: stakeholders expecting companies to communicate progress rather than stay quiet, regulators fining directly for misleading environmental claims, investors checking whether lobbying matches climate goals, and increasing climate, human rights, and supply chain crises. As the voice of the organisation, you feel these pressures first.

The good news: you don't need to become a sustainability expert. Your sustainability team can supply the data, targets, and technical detail behind a story, explain what new regulation means for the business, and set out what the company needs from policy – you keep the narrative and the stakeholder relationships. However, it benefits both corporate affairs and sustainability to collaborate.

64% of people trust business (Edelman Trust Barometer 2026)

78% of employees trust their own employer (Edelman Trust Barometer 2026)

THE BENEFITS TO YOU

A story with substance

Sustainability brings the data, targets, and operational reality, so your narrative stands up to scrutiny from journalists, investors, and NGOs.

Trust you can keep

Business is trusted by 64% of people, and 78% of employees trust their own employer (Edelman Trust Barometer 2026). Communicating progress, including the difficult parts, protects that trust.

Policy that works for the business

The same work that manages regulatory costs and reduces policy barriers also finds the grants and incentives available for the low-carbon transition.

Fewer crises, better responses

Teams aligned with sustainability can communicate difficult truths without losing trust; siloed teams face the highest risk of inconsistency.

Credibility with investors

Disclosures and lobbying that match the company's stated goals score well with investors and rating agencies.

A protected licence to operate

Open relationships with communities and civil society prevent social and environmental issues from turning into costly controversies.

A seat at the strategy table

Enabling policy and decarbonisation go hand in hand, so corporate affairs plays a strategic role in driving progress on company targets.

WHERE SUSTAINABILITY SHOWS UP IN YOUR WORK

Sustainability isn’t a separate campaign. It sits inside work you already do.

Your area of work	Why it matters to you	What it looks like in practice
Reputation and narrative	Stakeholders expect progress to be communicated, and the case is shifting from virtue to value: resilience, productivity, competitiveness, and talent.	Translate sustainability data into credible narratives that build environmental and social progress into the business case, rather than presenting it separately.
Policy and public affairs	Most large companies can’t meet their targets without the right policy environment, and regulation brings both costs and incentives.	Start policy positions from alignment with the Paris Agreement and the company’s own goals. Live UK examples include the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan, packaging extended producer responsibility, and the deposit return scheme due in October 2027.
Trade associations	Investors, including through Climate Action 100+, expect companies to disclose how their lobbying, directly and through trade associations, aligns with their climate goals.	Review trade associations against your climate policy, using the Global Standard on Responsible Climate Lobbying and InfluenceMap’s LobbyMap.
Investor relations and disclosure	Investors and rating agencies factor ESG metrics into decisions, with the UK Sustainability Reporting Standards (UK SRS) and the EU CSRD setting the disclosure baseline.	Keep the financial and sustainability narratives consistent, and disclose barriers and challenges as well as progress.
Stakeholder engagement and risk	The World Economic Forum’s Global Risks Report 2026 ranks misinformation and societal polarisation among the top short-term risks, and extreme weather and biodiversity loss as the top long-term ones.	Engage communities, NGOs, and civil society openly on human rights, local impacts, and community investment to protect the licence to operate. Work with sustainability to understand how the business is responding to ESG risk.
Internal communications	Ambitions only land if employees understand and believe in them.	Connect the company’s ambitions to people’s roles, share progress and setbacks honestly, and equip employees to act as credible ambassadors.
Crisis management	Climate events, supply chain controversies, human rights violations, and greenwashing allegations are now among the most common corporate crises.	Build sustainability input into crisis protocols, so the facts are checked before anything is said publicly.
Claims and greenhushing	The CMA can fine businesses directly for misleading environmental claims (Green Claims Code), yet going quiet leaves stakeholders to fear the worst.	Avoid both over-claiming and under-claiming: say what is true and evidenced, own the trade-offs, and explain them.

GETTING THE MOST FROM YOUR SUSTAINABILITY TEAM

Corporate affairs runs on news cycles and policy shifts; sustainability runs on long-term targets. The value comes from a regular rhythm that brings the two clocks together, rather than calling sustainability in when a story breaks.

1. **Set a regular rhythm**
   Agree on regular check-ins, plus an annual exercise to prioritise a short list of policy asks you can focus on. Repetition matters more than structure.
2. **Ask what the business needs from policy**
   Let sustainability define the policy asks behind the transition plan, while you work out the process, the stakeholders, and the coalitions.
3. **Get the facts before you speak**
   Ask for the data, trade-offs, and evidence behind every claim and crisis line, so you can communicate difficult truths with confidence.
4. **Build one narrative together**
   Agree on one global story, covering challenges as well as progress, with local examples that each market or business unit can adapt.
5. **Ask for it in your language**
   Expect sustainability to translate targets and regulation into stakeholder and reputational terms. Training should run both ways, and the UN Global Compact Academy offers free courses for the whole business.