



Pre-Construction Sustainability Workflows

Tools to integrate sustainability into preconstruction so it sticks on the job, not just in marketing materials.



Contributors

This resource was developed by design professionals in the Sustainable Construction Leaders Peer Network facilitated by Green Commons. The following members led the drafting and development of this document (in alphabetical order):

Geoff Yamasaki - Hensel Phelps
Leslie Weaver - IPS - Integrated Project Services
Max Driscoll - AECOM

Formatting and cover design by Green Commons.

About Green Commons

Green Commons, LLC, is a consultancy and convener of AEC professionals for peer support, peer-to-peer learning, and collective action. Green Commons' Peer Networks offer shared space where leaders support one another and work together toward sustainable solutions as a community – intent on moving projects, the industry, and the world forward in the best possible way. We recognize the need and value in transcending competition as we work together, professionally and collectively, to advance our common cause, with a shared commitment to collaboration and improvement.

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PRECONSTRUCTION SUSTAINABILITY WORKFLOWS

what to ask when

This guide explains when and how to integrate sustainability into preconstruction so it sticks on the job, not just in marketing materials.

What this workflow is:

This document lays out key sustainability actions by topic, project phase, and delivery model (Design-Build, CM at-Risk, and General Contractor). It focuses on the decisions that shape cost, schedule, and risk before construction starts, when changes are still practical and budget friendly.

Each topic—Carbon, Jobsite Wellness, Waste, Water, Materials, and Certifications—follows the same one-page format:

- A table broken down by phases (Pursuit, SD/DD, CD/Procurement, CD/Mobilization).
- Four consistent prompts per phase: Ask, Do, Output, and Lead Roles.
- A short delivery model note calling out where Design-Build, CM at-Risk, or GC approaches differ.

How to read each page:

Each topic page is designed for quick scanning by busy project teams.

- **Ask** highlights the questions that should be asked/answered to ensure that topic is incorporated into the project scope.
Think of this as, *“What should we be talking about right now, so we do not regret it later?”*
- **Do** lists the specific actions that move the topic forward at that phase.
- **Output** describes deliverables by the end of the phase: language in the RFP, draft specs, tracking plans, contract requirements, or tools in place.
- **Lead roles** shows which team members are primarily responsible for driving those actions. These are the people that need to be engaged by the Sustainability Lead (you!) at each phase.

At the bottom of the page, a short **delivery model section** explains how the workflow shifts for Design-Build, CM at-Risk, and GC work, so you can adapt the same logic to different contract structures.

Why this matters for preconstruction:

Most sustainability outcomes are locked in long before subcontractor mobilization. Choices about (and changes to) systems, materials, site logistics, and contract language happen during preconstruction. If the

right questions are not asked in these windows, the project team is often left trying to “fix” sustainability goals later with change orders or inefficient workarounds.

These workflows aim to help:

- Bring the **right people** into the conversation at the right time.
- Make sure expectations are **written into scopes, specs, and contracts**, not handled informally.
- Turn broad client sustainability goals into **clear, phase-based tasks** that align with your existing precon process.

How to use this with your team:

- Bring the relevant topic page to **pursuit and precon meetings** so the “Ask” and “Do” lines can be incorporated into agendas.
- During **bidding and kickoff meetings**, refer to the CD/Procurement and CD/Mobilization columns to confirm that requirements and tracking expectations are incorporated into contracts and startup plans.
- Adjust Lead roles to match your company’s titles and structure while keeping the intent the same.

The goal is not to add a separate sustainability process, but to weave a small number of high-impact questions and actions into the preconstruction work contractors and construction managers are already doing. When these workflows are executed, your company will become more effective at deploying sustainability across **all projects**, not just the trophy projects with high aspirations.

PURSUIT	SD / DD	CD / PROCUREMENT	CD / MOBILIZATION
Ask What are the owner's carbon goals? Which trades matter most? What past low-carbon successes strengthen the pursuit?	Ask What carbon targets can be written into specs? Which low-carbon concrete and steel options are feasible? Emerging cost / schedule impacts?	Ask Can suppliers and field teams meet the specified targets? Are carbon requirements fully embedded in bid scope and subcontract language?	Ask How will jobsite emissions be reduced and tracked from day one? Are anti-idling, electrification, and renewable diesel plans ready?
Do Identify goals, target trades, and client sustainability priorities. Highlight relevant carbon-reduction experience in pursuit materials.	Do Set concrete GWP thresholds and preferred steel approaches. Run LCCA where useful. Hold carbon kickoff with design team and structural engineer. Test feasibility with key trades and ready-mix suppliers.	Do Confirm embodied carbon targets are achievable in the market. Include fuel tracking and carbon tracking in subcontracts. Carry agreed low-carbon materials into final bids.	Do Implement anti-idling plan. Identify jobsite electrification opportunities. Verify renewable diesel availability. Review submittals and require EPD-backed tracking forms.
Output Carbon goals identified Priority trades list Pursuit narrative	Output Draft targets in specs/drawings Feasibility feedback Preferred low-carbon scope	Output Carbon requirements in procurement package Final bid alignment Tracking language in contracts	Output Site carbon procedures Submittal review protocol Embodied carbon tracking live
Lead roles Owner, Design Team, Marketing	Lead roles Design Team, Trade PMs, Precon Leads, Suppliers	Lead roles Procurement Lead, Trade PMs, Superintendent	Lead roles Trade PMs, Superintendent

Note on roles: it is assumed that the Sustainability Lead (you!) is involved in all tasks.

Delivery model differences

Design-Build	Earlier integration of design decisions, specs, and trade feasibility during SD/DD.
CM at-Risk	Similar core workflow, but DD/Precon and CD/Precon handoffs should be labeled clearly.
General Contractor	Add a note clarifying whether precon scope exists and which carbon asks can realistically happen before mobilization.

PURSUIT	SD / DD	CD / PROCUREMENT	CD / MOBILIZATION
Ask What are the contractor's jobsite wellness goals? What past jobsite wellness successes strengthen the pursuit?	Ask Has the jobsite wellness plan been included in the bid scope?	Ask Are jobsite wellness requirements fully embedded in bid scope and subcontract language? Which jobsite wellness measures, if any, include cost premiums?	Ask How will jobsite wellness be tracked from day one?
Do Set jobsite wellness goals	Do Create jobsite wellness plan	Do Confirm jobsite wellness goals are achievable in the market. Include jobsite wellness tracking forms in subcontracts.	Do Execute jobsite wellness plan All trades to complete jobsite wellness tracking forms Regularly check in with trade partners and perform corrective action where needed
Output Jobsite wellness goals identified Pursuit narrative	Output Jobsite wellness plan	Output Jobsite wellness requirements in procurement package Final bid alignment Tracking language in contracts	Output Jobsite wellness procedures Jobsite wellness tracking live
Lead roles Owner, Design Team, Marketing	Lead roles Precon Leads	Lead roles Superintendent, Trade PMs	Lead roles Superintendent, Trade PMs
Note on roles: it is assumed that the Sustainability Lead (you!) is involved in all tasks.			

Delivery model differences

Design-Build	Earlier creation and execution of jobsite wellness plan. Potential need for additional coordination between office and field teams.
CM at-Risk	More defined and reduced scope of jobsite wellness measures
General Contractor	

PURSUIT		SD / DD	CD / PROCUREMENT	CD / MOBILIZATION
Ask What are the waste reduction and/or diversion goals for the project? Does the client have corporate initiatives impacted by the waste on this project?	Do Define waste strategy and goals for the project.	Ask What waste handling infrastructure is available to the project (local reclaims, recyclers, donation centers)? Are there RCI facilities in the project region? Is salvage feasible on this project?	Ask Is a project specific Salvage and CWM plan available for inclusion in bid packages? Have all trades reviewed the project requirements (such as on-site separation)?	Ask Have Salvage and CWM plan requirements been reinforced in the trade premobilization meetings? Has the project team developed a Salvage or CWM tracking method to account for all waste streams and reduction measures?
		Do Identify potential waste facilities/haulers and discuss waste handling and end use markets specific to the facilities. Conduct facility visits. Develop a Salvage and CWM plan.	Do Confirm planned CWM process is accounted for in project costs. Discuss CWM expectations with each bidder during descope meetings.	Do Review requirements at subcontractor premobilization. Confirm implementation responsibilities and tracking approach.
Output Proposal narrative		Output List of regional facilities for CWM. Project Salvage and CWM plan. Bid-scope language.	Output Requirements aligned across drawings, bids, and contracts. Trade understanding confirmed.	Output Premobilization meeting minutes. Construction tracking plan in place.
Lead roles Marketing, Project Managers		Lead roles Design Team, Estimator, PMs, Subs, Precon Lead	Lead roles Design Team, PMs, Subs, Procurement	Lead roles PMs, Subs
Note on roles: it is assumed that the Sustainability Lead (you!) is involved in all tasks.				

Delivery model differences

Design-Build	Identify waste reduction design strategies and issue project specifications aligned with project waste goals prior to waste removal from site SD/DD.
CM at-Risk	Focus DD/Precon on high-impact construction scopes, subcontractor input, and bid-scope language before CD procurement.
General Contractor	Main role begins at CD/Procurement: review contract documents and create/enforce CWM plan with subcontractor and facility input.

PURSUIT	SD / DD	CD / PROCUREMENT	CD / MOBILIZATION
Ask Is water a critical regional issue for this project? Should water strategy appear in the pursuit response?	Ask Which design and construction scopes have the highest water impact? Which water-efficiency systems are worth pricing now? Can key trades support measurement and reduction goals?	Ask Are water-efficiency requirements fully captured in drawings, bid scope, and contracts? Have high-impact trades reviewed the requirements?	Ask Have water requirements been reinforced with trades before field start? Is the project team ready to track water-related commitments?
Do Include the water approach in the RFP response. If a regional resource stress, highlight water efficiency as a risk management approach.	Do Identify high-impact scopes and trades. Engage key subs on options and cost impacts. Price fixtures, irrigation, landscape, and reuse systems as design develops. Develop measurement/reduction approach. Carry requirements into bid scope.	Do Confirm efficient systems remain in budget and in the documents. Review water requirements at de-scope meetings. Write requirements into subcontractor agreements.	Do Review requirements again at subcontractor kickoff. Confirm implementation responsibilities and tracking approach.
Output Water strategy in pursuit materials Regional risk identified	Output Priority scopes list with efficiency options Priced water-efficiency options Bid-scope language	Output Requirements aligned across drawings, bids, and contracts Trade understanding confirmed	Output Kickoff alignment Field-ready implementation plan
Lead roles Marketing	Lead roles Design Team, Estimator, PMs, Subs, Precon Lead	Lead roles Design Team, PMs, Subs, Procurement	Lead roles PMs, Subs
Note on roles: it is assumed that the Sustainability Lead (you!) is involved in all tasks.			

Delivery model differences

Design-Build	Integrate design-side water systems pricing and construction-side water reduction planning during SD/DD.
CM at-Risk	Focus DD/Precon on high-impact construction scopes, subcontractor input, and bid-scope language before CD procurement.
General Contractor	Main role begins at CD/Procurement: review documents for water-efficiency items, carry requirements into contracts, and reinforce at kickoff.

PURSUIT		SD / DD	CD / PROCUREMENT	CD / MOBILIZATION
Ask What are the material related goals for the project (low carbon, material transparency, low VOC/TVOC)? Does the client have corporate initiatives impacted by material selection on this project?	Do Define material goals for the project.	Ask What local materials are available to the project (ready mix concrete facilities, SCM availability, local reclaims)? Can /Should any materials on site be reused?	Ask Is a project specific Materials plan available for inclusion in bid packages? Have all trades reviewed the project requirements (such as low carbon material procurement)? Do materials specifications align with Materials plan?	Ask Have Material plan requirements been reinforced in the trade premobilization meetings? Has the project team developed a Materials tracking method to track towards project goals?
		Do Identify potential salvage opportunities. Coordinate with local suppliers to identify local opportunities. Develop project specific material plans.	Do Confirm Materials plan is accounted for in project costs. Discuss Material procurement expectations with each bidder during descope meetings.	Do Review requirements at subcontractor premobilization. Confirm implementation responsibilities and tracking approach.
Output Proposal narrative		Output List of regional material suppliers (e.g. concrete plants). Project Materials plan. Bid-scope language	Output Requirements aligned across drawings, bids, and contracts Trade understanding confirmed	Output Premobilization meeting minutes Material tracking/validation plan
Lead roles Marketing, Project Managers		Lead roles Design Team, Estimator, PMs, Subs, Precon Lead	Lead roles Design Team, PMs, Subs, Procurement, Estimators	Lead roles PMs, Subs
Note on roles: it is assumed that the Sustainability Lead (you!) is involved in all tasks.				

Delivery model differences

Design-Build	Identify material design strategies and issue project specifications aligned with project goals in SD/DD.
CM at-Risk	Focus DD/Precon on high-impact construction scopes, subcontractor input, and bid-scope language before CD procurement.
General Contractor	Main role begins at CD/Procurement: review contract documents and reinforce/track project materials plan with subcontractor.

PURSUIT	SD / DD	CD / PROCUREMENT	CD / MOBILIZATION
Ask Should certification strategy be part of the pursuit approach? Which rating system or target level matters most to the client?	Ask Which credits are most vulnerable to value engineering? Which credits carry schedule or long-lead risk? What requirements must be built into bid packages now?	Ask Are documentation requirements fully embedded in drawings, bid scope, and subcontract language? Have key trades reviewed their certification responsibilities?	Ask Has the team reinforced trade-specific certification expectations before work starts? Is construction-phase tracking ready to launch?
Do Include certification delivery strategy in RFP response. Align on target certification path early.	Do Prioritize credits by cost and VE risk. Flag credits with schedule exposure, such as flush-out or long-lead energy and water systems. Add documentation requirements to bid packages.	Do Confirm documentation requirements appear in project documents. Review requirements in trade de-scope meetings. Include certification obligations in subcontractor contracts.	Do Reinforce expectations at subcontractor kickoff. Launch construction-phase tracking software or workflow as applicable.
Output Certification strategy in pursuit materials Target pathway identified	Output Priority credit list VE-risk and schedule-risk flags Bid-package documentation requirements	Output Requirements aligned across drawings, bids, and contracts Trade responsibilities confirmed	Output Kickoff alignment Live certification tracking workflow
Lead roles Marketing	Lead roles Estimator, Precon Lead, PMs	Lead roles Design Team, PMs, Subs, Procurement	Lead roles Trade PMs, Supers, Subs, Procurement
Note on roles: it is assumed that the Sustainability Lead (you!) is involved in all tasks.			

Delivery model differences

Design-Build	Use SD/DD to protect priority credits in design and carry documentation needs forward before procurement.
CM at-Risk	Emphasize VE-vulnerable credits, schedule-risk credits, and early bid-package documentation requirements during DD/Precon.
General Contractor	Focus on document review, subcontract requirements, and construction-phase tracking once design is established.