

Sustainable Business Model Canvas



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Introduction

The Sustainable Business Model Canvas (SBMC) Guideline is a practical teaching tool developed to help educators integrate sustainability into business model education. Based on the classic Business Model Canvas by Osterwalder & Pigneur, the SBMC expands the original framework with critical sustainability aspects, enabling students to align economic, environmental, and social value creation.

This guideline supports educators in facilitating workshops, classroom exercises, or project work that promote sustainable entrepreneurship. It provides step-by-step instructions, key guiding questions, and an example canvas to demonstrate application.

Learning Objectives

Teaching sustainable business models requires a clear vision of the competences students should develop. This section outlines key educational goals, such as the ability to think systemically, recognize environmental and social consequences of business decisions, and develop viable models that balance profit with responsibility.

By using this tool, students will be able to:

- Understand the components of a sustainable business model.
- Integrate sustainability principles into entrepreneurial thinking.
- Reflect on the long-term impact of business decisions.
- Develop viable business concepts with environmental and social value.
- Collaborate in teams to refine ideas using a structured tool.

Structure of the SBMC

The SBMC adapts and expands the original Business Model Canvas by integrating sustainability considerations into the traditional logic of value creation. In doing so, it shifts the focus from short-term profit maximization to long-term value for multiple stakeholders. This section explains the structure and logic of the SBMC as a tool for designing businesses that contribute positively to society and the planet.

The SBMC contains 11 building blocks, grouped into **three dimensions**:

A. Value Creation

1. Customer Segments
2. Value Proposition
3. Channels
4. Customer Relationships

B. Value Delivery

5. Key Activities
6. Key Resources

7. Key Partners

C. Value Capture & Impact

8. Revenue Streams

9. Cost Structure

10. Environmental Impact

11. Social Impact

How to Use the SBMC in Teaching (Example)

The SBMC is both a conceptual and a practical tool. In the classroom, it can be used to support individual or group-based idea development, encourage interdisciplinary collaboration, and provide a structured way to reflect on impact. This section provides general guidance on how to introduce and apply the SBMC in various educational settings.

Step 1: Preparation

- Introduce the Business Model Canvas as a base framework.
- Present the SBMC and explain its extended purpose.
- Discuss sustainability dimensions and the relevance for business strategy.
- Distribute blank SBMC templates (physical or digital).

Step 2: Business Model Development

- Ask students to develop or refine a business idea using the SBMC.
- Use guiding questions for each building block (see below).
- Work in teams to complete the canvas collaboratively.

Step 3: Presentation & Feedback

- Each team presents their SBMC to peers or mentors.
- Encourage reflection on the feasibility and impact of the business model.
- Provide structured feedback using sustainability and viability criteria.

Guiding Questions for Each Block

Sustainability often raises complex, open-ended questions. To help students critically reflect on each aspect of their business model, this section offers guiding questions tailored to sustainability thinking. These prompts enable learners to move beyond standard assumptions and explore what it means to create sustainable value.

Customer Segments

- Who are your key customers and stakeholders?
- Are there underserved or marginalised groups you aim to support?

Value Proposition

- What environmental or social value does your product/service deliver?
- How is sustainability integrated into your offering?

Channels

- How do you reach customers in a sustainable way (e.g., digital, low-emission transport)?

Customer Relationships

- How do you build trust and loyalty through transparency and responsibility?

Key Activities

- Which activities are essential for your sustainable value creation?
- Are your operations energy/resource-efficient?

Key Resources

- What resources are needed (human, financial, natural)?
- Can you use renewable or shared resources?

Key Partners

- Which partners support your sustainability goals (e.g., NGOs, cooperatives)?

Revenue Streams

- How do you earn revenue in a socially responsible way?
- Are there alternative or impact-based revenue models?

Cost Structure

- What are your key costs?
- How do you manage costs without compromising sustainability?

Environmental Impact

- What is your ecological footprint across the lifecycle?
- How do you minimise emissions, waste, and resource use?

Social Impact

- How does your model affect employees, communities, and society?
- Are you promoting inclusion, equity, or empowerment?

Example: Sustainable Business Model Canvas – Upcycle Café

This sample SBMC illustrates how a sustainable business model might look in practice. It shows how economic, ecological, and social dimensions can be integrated into a coherent entrepreneurial concept.

Block	Example Content
Customer Segments	Urban environmentally conscious millennials and students
Value Proposition	Affordable café experience with zero-waste philosophy using upcycled furniture
Channels	Local flyers, Instagram, community events
Customer Relationships	Community loyalty program; sustainability storytelling in-store
Key Activities	Sourcing surplus food; hosting awareness events
Key Resources	Reclaimed furniture; local food partnerships; volunteer staff
Key Partners	Local food rescue NGO; upcycling workshop space
Revenue Streams	Coffee/beverage sales; event rentals; donations

Block	Example Content
Cost Structure	Low-cost inventory; staff stipends; rent
Environmental Impact	Reduced food waste; reuse of materials; energy-efficient equipment
Social Impact	Inclusive hiring; community awareness; local engagement

Recommendations for Educators

Teaching with the SBMC requires not only a grasp of sustainability concepts but also the ability to foster open discussion, iterative thinking, and critical reflection.

- Encourage critical discussion about **trade-offs between sustainability and profitability**.
- Use **real-world examples or guest speakers** to enrich sessions.
- Facilitate reflection on **long-term viability and ethical responsibility**.
- Consider pairing the SBMC with other tools (e.g., stakeholder maps, impact assessments).
- Offer students **iterations** of their canvas with feedback loops.

Resources for Implementation

Effective teaching tools require the right setup. Whether used in workshops, seminars, or full courses, this section outlines the practical resources needed to implement the SBMC. From templates to facilitation materials, these resources support you in delivering impactful sustainability education.

- Printable or editable **SBMC template (PDF / digital whiteboard format)**
- **Slides** introducing the tool and its purpose
- **Case studies** on sustainable business models
- Access to collaboration tools like Miro, Jamboard, or large-format paper/posters
- Optional: videos or readings on sustainable entrepreneurship