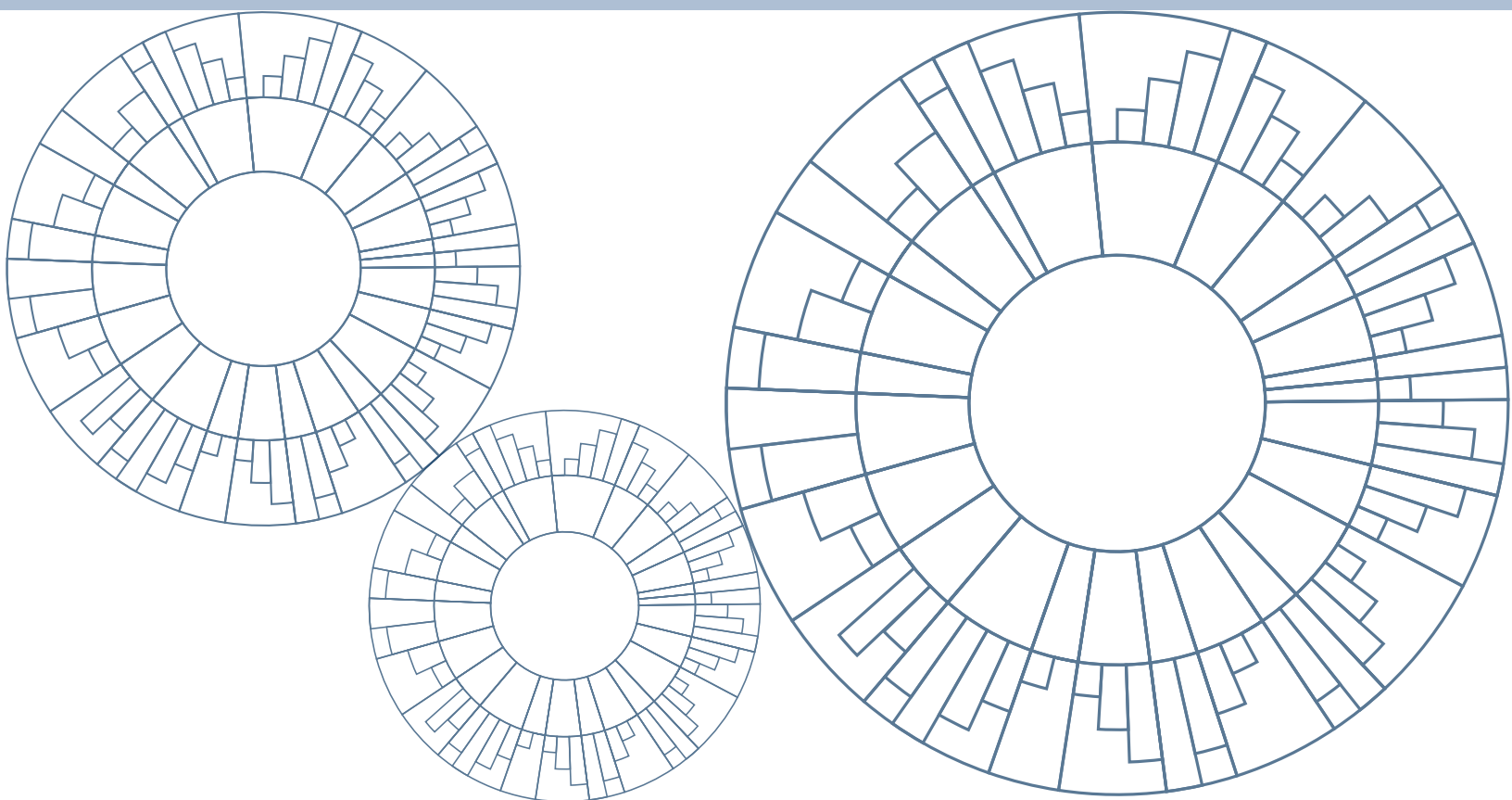


# An Introduction to the Embedding Framework



# An Introduction to the Embedding Framework

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Bertels, S., and Schulschenk, J. (2015) *Introduction to Framework*. Embedding Project. DOI:10.6084/m9.figshare.3899106.

Proactive companies are working to embed sustainability across their operations and into their decision-making. This guide is a practical starting point to help you understand what embedding looks like, how to assess your company's progress, and where to prioritize your efforts.

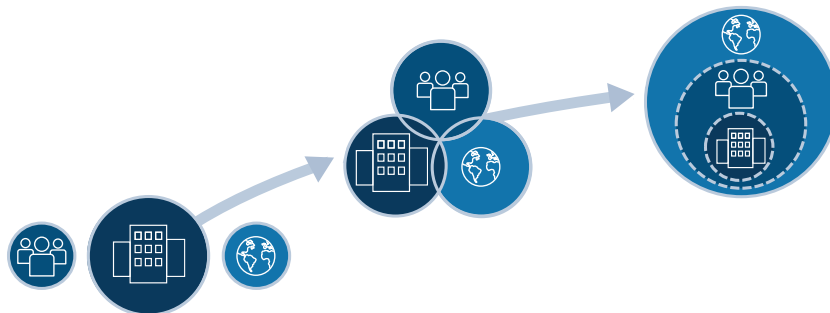
To find out more about what we do and to see more resources on embedding sustainability, visit [embeddingproject.org](https://embeddingproject.org)

# What do we mean by business sustainability?

Although there is no one agreed upon definition, in this guide, business sustainability refers to:

*Business models and managerial decisions that create value over the short, medium and long term, based on mutually beneficial interactions between the company's value chain and the social and environmental systems on which it depends.<sup>1</sup>*

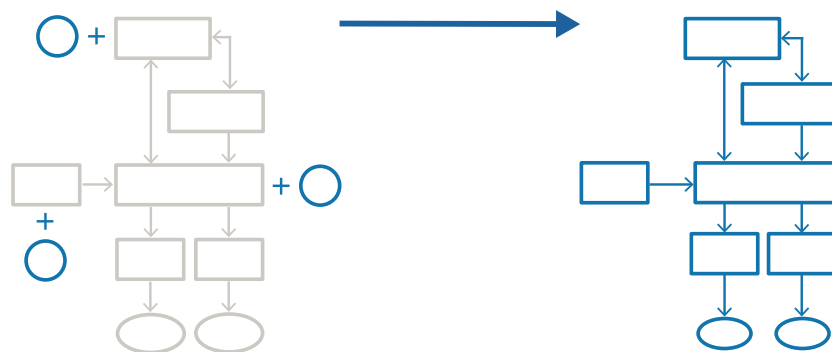
This definition of business sustainability recognizes that all business takes place within the context of a set of planetary boundaries<sup>2</sup> and social thresholds<sup>3</sup>. Businesses operate as part of a nested system bounded by the social and environmental systems that surround them.



Embedding sustainability is about integrating sustainability across the business, to the point that it is no longer considered an 'add-on' but simply 'the way we do business'.

Sustainability is an add-on

"The way we do business"



<sup>1</sup> NBS-SA. 2014. Pathways to change. Cape Town: Network for Business Sustainability South Africa.

<sup>2</sup> Steffen et al. 2015. Planetary Boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. Science Vol. 347 no. 6223

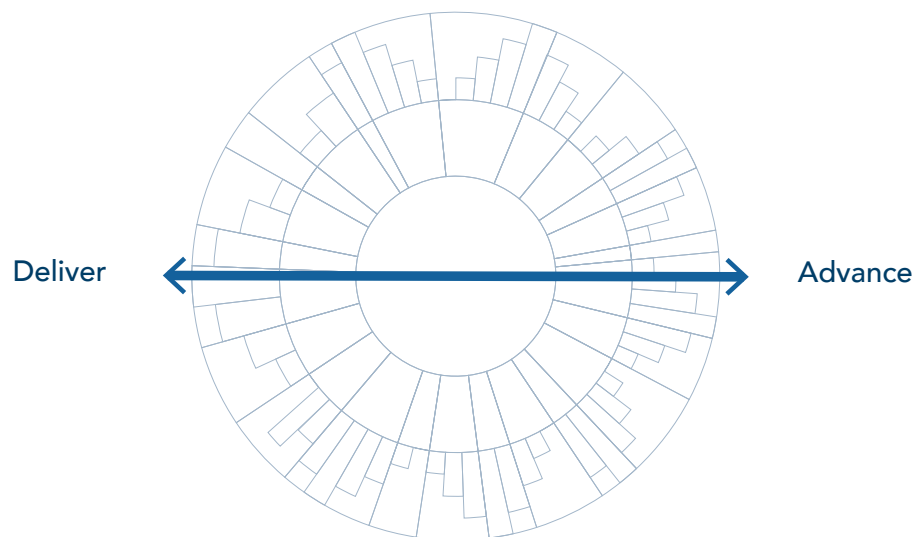
<sup>3</sup> Raworth, K. (2012). A safe and just space for humanity: can we live within the doughnut. Oxfam Policy and Practice: Climate Change and Resilience, 8(1), 1-26.



# Making sense of the Embedding Wheel framework

The Embedding Framework consists of 60 distinct practices, organized into into a set of 13 pathways, all oriented around two main axes.

## WHAT YOU ARE WORKING TOWARDS: DELIVERING OR ADVANCING

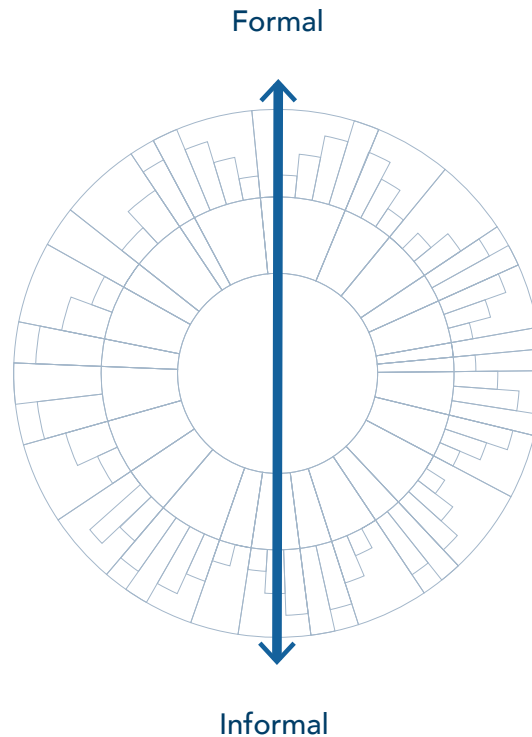


The horizontal axis highlights the importance of simultaneously attending to two different goals: meeting existing sustainability commitments (deliver) and making way for the changes that will help improve sustainability performance in the future (advance).

On the left of the framework you'll find the practices that support the fulfilment of your organization's current sustainability objectives. These are the practices that help you deliver on existing sustainability practices and commitments.

On the right hand side, you'll find the practices that help advance your sustainability agenda. These practices help foster the innovation that will drive future improvements to your sustainability performance.

## HOW YOU ARE GOING ABOUT IT: FORMAL AND INFORMAL APPROACHES

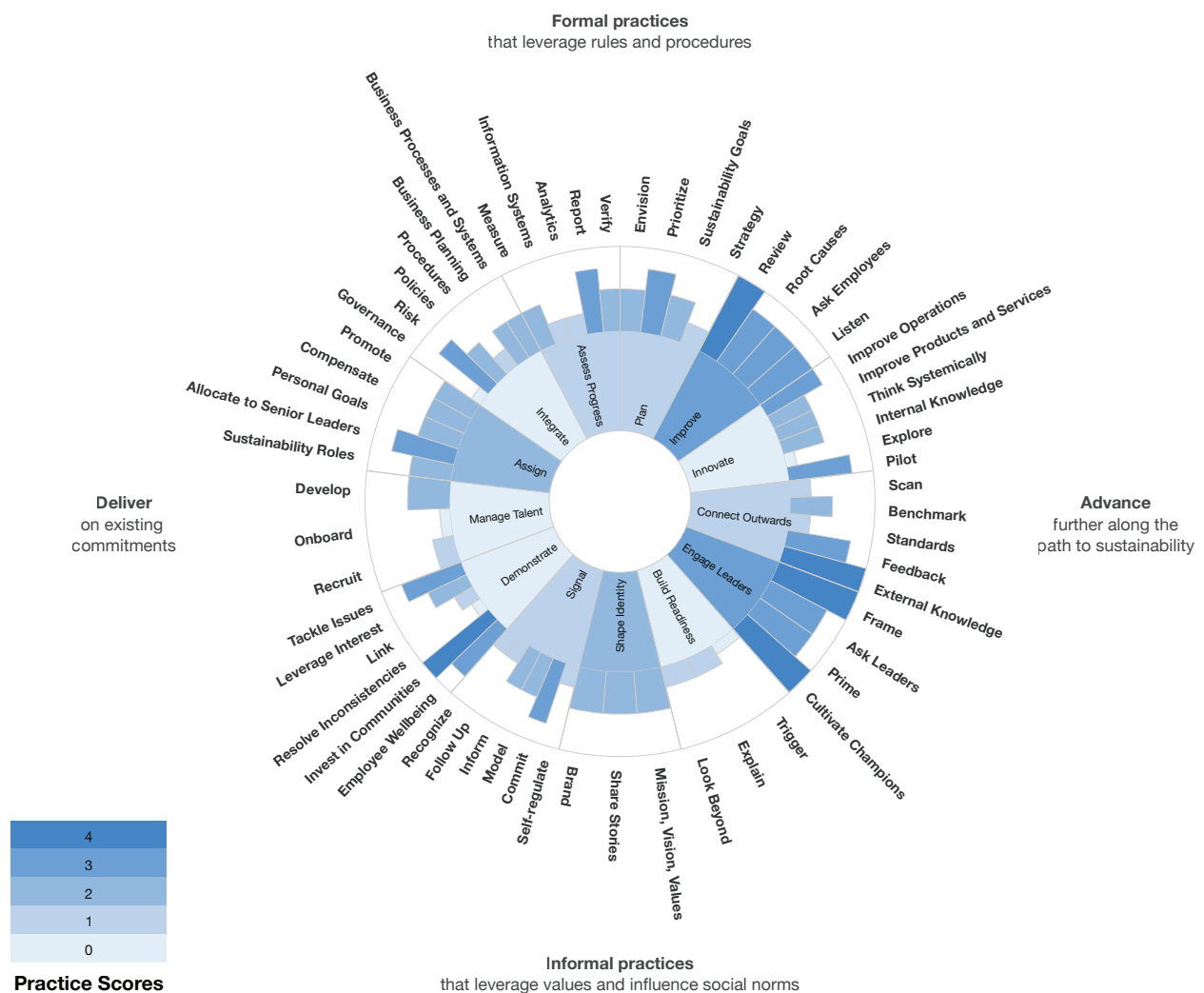


The vertical axis reinforces the need to attend to both of these goals using two different means (formal and informal).

In the top half of the framework are the more formal practices, those that try to guide behaviour through the use of rules, systems, procedures and metrics.

On the bottom are a set of more informal practices that target the organization's social norms. Norms are generally passed on and shaped through observation or experience and are enforced by other members of the organization through the use of social sanctions. Thus, informal approaches aim to establish and reinforce shared ways of doing things that align the organization with its journey to sustainability.

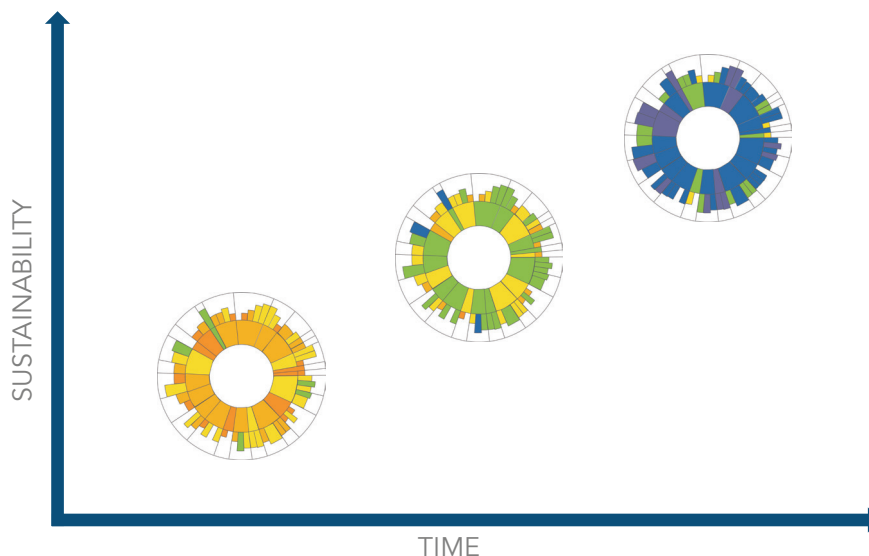
Over a three-year period, we conducted hundreds of interviews and worked with 16 global companies to refine our framework and establish a 5-point continuum of embeddedness for each of the practices.



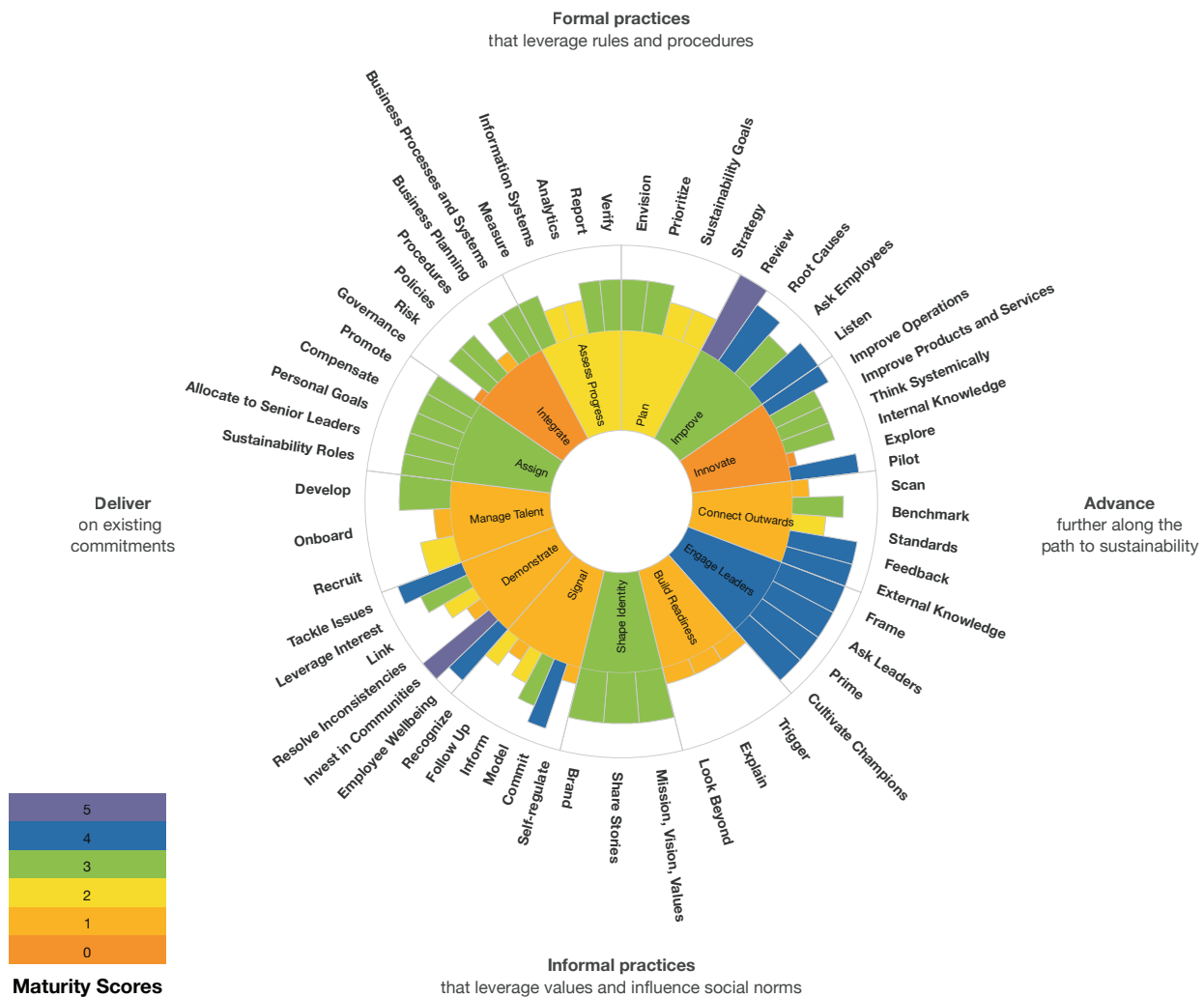


# From a practices assessment to a maturity model

We learned that a low score on a particular practice is only part of the story. Some practices are more important at early stages of the journey, others can wait until you are a bit further along. We depict this maturity using a colour scheme – from yellow, through orange, green, blue to purple – and in terms of the length of the segment moving outwards on the wheel.



We recognize that embedding sustainability is not a quick or linear process and that no two companies will have the same two journeys. Yet despite this, based on a rigorous analysis of key leverage points and sticking points, we have been able to identify common sequences of practices that are indicative of an organization's maturity. We found these sequences to be quite robust across industries and geography.



This has allowed us to develop a maturity model, which translates your practices assessment into a visualization of your organization's maturity, and ultimately, into a set of recommendations of where to focus your efforts next. This visualization can also be a useful to help communicate and motivate a set of priority actions among others in your company, including senior leadership.

# What next?

Undertake a free, preliminary practices self-assessment: [embeddingproject.org/resources/embedding-sustainability-self-assessment](https://embeddingproject.org/resources/embedding-sustainability-self-assessment)

Visit [embeddingproject.org/resources](https://embeddingproject.org/resources) for a curated collection of tools and resources we have compiled to help you with each of the practices.

Keep returning, or sign-up for updates. We will continue to update the website with new resources and tools.

**Interested in a more in-depth understanding?** Contact us to find out about the full practices assessment process, our Regional Peer-to-Peer Networks and our Global Communities of Practice. Join the research project to receive support from our research team so that we can guide you through the process, calibrate your progress against that of other companies and work with you to help translate your results into action plans and tangible next steps.

[embeddingproject.org/assessment-process](https://embeddingproject.org/assessment-process)

# About the Embedding Project

The Embedding Project is a collaboration between leading sustainability researchers and practitioners undertaking pioneering work on embedding sustainability globally. By facilitating global communities of practice, we gather the best available knowledge and, working with our practitioner members, we create practical assessments, guidebooks and tools that help you chart your company's path to good business.

Our work is anchored in a review of prior academic and practitioner work on embedding sustainability conducted in 2010 for the Network for Business Sustainability that resulted in a framework to guide companies in their sustainability efforts. Our framework charts a portfolio of organizational practices that, together, lead to embedding and highlight the importance of balancing your efforts to deliver on your sustainability commitments while laying the foundation for the changes that will help you become more sustainable.

The initial framework was enthusiastically received by the business community and in response to requests from organizations for more information and guidance on implementation, Dr. Bertels in partnership with the Network for Business Sustainability brought together a dozen leading global companies to form an Embedding Sustainability Working Group to test and refine the framework. Working for three years with global practitioners, the framework has now been refined into a practices assessment tool that charts an organization's maturity and embeddedness.

We invite you and your company to participate in this ongoing research and join other companies leading this effort. The Embedding Project can help you understand your past efforts, identify gaps, benchmark against your peers, prioritize next steps, and provide the guidance to do so. Our partner companies benefit through opportunities to learn from their peers in facilitated and structured processes that explore the topics that matter to you.

To learn more about how the Embedding Project could support you and your company, visit us at [embeddingproject.org](https://embeddingproject.org).

# Acknowledgements

We are grateful to the organizations that participated in the Embedding Sustainability Working Group and in the creation of this guide for their commitment and support of our research.



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