



SUSTAINABILITY BY DESIGN

RETHINKING
NEW YORK
FASHION WEEK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council of Fashion Designers of America in partnership with Boston Consulting Group

LETTER FROM THE CEO



"Today, we are pleased to offer the fashion industry a strategic set of guidelines and recommendations tailored for design, production, and PR teams as a blueprint to charter informed, responsible choice making."

STEVEN KOLB
CEO, CFDA

In February, the CFDA and Boston Consulting Group launched a focused study on the environmental impact of New York Fashion Week.

From printed invites to plastic bottles and lighting equipment, we saw an urgent need for the project, and our goal was to create a comprehensive report and playbook for brands as a guideline to implement creative strategies and reduce both waste and the carbon footprint of fashion shows and related New York Fashion Week events and activities.

At the time, nobody could have anticipated the global impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to unprecedented economic challenges and uncertainty, and demanded that we all radically rethink and reset every aspect of the fashion system.

This complex moment requires us to be resilient and innovative- and continue in our direct efforts to address the urgent climate change and pollution related impacts of our industry. Although this September's New York Fashion Week was entirely online on CFDA's innovative new digital platform RUNWAY360, we strongly felt that sustainability, which has been a CFDA pillar for over a decade with the Sustainability Resource Hub on CFDA.com and programs such as Elaine Gold Launch Pad and CFDA + Lexus Fashion* Initiative, is more important than ever.

The purpose of this work is to answer the industry's heightened call to action and specifically address the environmental impact of New York Fashion Week and its local ecosystem through various dimensions including carbon and waste impacts. These findings and recommendations are intended not only to provide useful guidance to New York—as a major global fashion capital—but to be shared and built upon globally.

This Executive Summary encapsulates the research and findings of the subsequent full report and playbook of strategic guidelines and recommendations. This work and the CFDA's new RUNWAY360 platform are part of the CFDA's ongoing efforts to transform New York Fashion Week and position it for a viable future. We see both as a continuation of our 2016 "Examining the Future of New York Fashion Week" study, also conducted in partnership with Boston Consulting Group.

While much of the future remains uncertain, we continue to focus on the opportunity to foster positive change, and we strongly believe that the fashion industry's collective recovery must go hand in hand with a focus on transformation and building of new systems that incorporate sustainability, innovation, and ingenuity. We hope that this Executive Summary, forthcoming full report with playbook provide valuable guidance for brands locally and globally that aim to re-engage with their audiences physically, digitally – or both – for future fashion weeks.

On behalf of the CFDA and Boston Consulting Group, I would like to thank the United Nations Office of Partnerships, the Conscious Fashion Campaign, Terrapass, the research Steering Committee, and all those who contributed to this important work's research through interviews and focused surveys.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a severe impact on the fashion and luxury industry. Sales are down across the board, and companies along the entire fashion value chain have curtailed operations in response. Traditional fashion weeks, held annually or biannually in cities around the world, have been transformed or canceled outright. Those that elected to proceed have adopted various measures to protect participants and the public. For example, earlier in the year, during Milan Fashion Week Autumn/Winter, Armani live-streamed its show with no audience in attendance. Many others canceled their live shows, relying instead on digital platforms to showcase their new fashions.

If the current crisis has a silver lining, it is that the fashion industry can take this opportunity to rethink how it conducts business. New York Fashion Week (NYFW) is a case in point: Like its fashion week counterparts in other cities around the world, NYFW has been a key component of the fashion industry's creative process—not only showing off the latest efforts of designers across the fashion spectrum, but also generating much of the advertising and promotional content to see the industry through the ensuing six months. The live experience allows all the players in the industry—from designers and manufacturers to retailers and customers—to come together, exchange ideas, and discuss the latest trends. And it brings \$600 million in economic impact to New York City¹.

But there is also a downside. Activities tied to a fashion week can release as much as 48,000 metric tons of greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere. In the case of NYFW, up to 10,000 of the event's 25,000 or so participants fly into town, accounting for the largest portion of the GHG total, with additional emissions coming from the many trips they take from venue to venue once in New York. The manufacture of samples and other goods and of sets and props used during shows produces large amounts of waste, as do the many venues where shows are held. All of this represents a huge investment for brands and designers showing at NYFW, with budgets often running into the millions.

Prior to the coronavirus pandemic, consumers were already beginning to raise concerns about the impact of the GHGs and waste produced in the course of each NYFW, and some brands have begun taking measures to make the events more sustainable. Even so, NYFW is not exactly a picture of sustainability.

This September's edition of NYFW did not look like past fashion weeks. There were fewer live activities, a sharp reduction in the size of in-person audiences, and a heavier digital component. So now is a good time to think about how to improve NYFW's sustainability; to measure, reduce, and offset its environmental impact; and to devise other ways to ensure that the event moves toward a more sustainable future, rather than returning to its pre-pandemic state. Although NYFW's impact may be responsible for only a very small portion of the fashion industry's overall effect on the climate, it can serve as a bellwether for change—not only for the many other fashion weeks held worldwide, but also for the fashion industry as a whole.

In this report, we analyze NYFW's level of sustainability, ways to improve it, and lessons that the fashion industry can learn from the effort. In conclusion, we offer the NYFW Sustainability Playbook, with recommendations for making this event as environmentally friendly as possible, regardless of the format that brands and designers choose to use.

THE CONTEXT

It takes months and months of planning to put together each year's NYFW. Designers must create the lineups for their shows long before any product reaches stores. Event planners must devise highly complex schedules involving dozens of venues and ensure that each event comes off without a hitch. Clothing company executives, retail buyers, and journalists by the hundreds must make their own plans to get to New York and find accommodations there.

The live experience, bringing together players from throughout the fashion ecosystem, is often spectacular. Many participants consider it essential to the creative process, triggering design ideas and generating a great deal of fashion content—production innovation, advertising, marketing and public relations campaigns, retail strategies, and fashion journalism. In recent years, its influence has continued to grow. Over the past decade, NYFW and similar events around the world have moved beyond their industry audience to embrace thousands of fans and influencers across the domains of culture and business. “Fashion shows have still an immense value, for their ability to emotionally connect individuals,” says New York-based fashion designer Maria Cornejo.

But the world of fashion needs a reset. For some time, critics have raised concerns about the way the fashion industry operates, the nature of the fashion calendar, and the role that events such as NYFW play in it. The regular sequencing of clothing design, manufacture, and sale—not just in connection with the big biannual shows, but also in the increasingly important twice-yearly preseason collections—leads to a great deal of waste and lost revenues. Retailers


must buy inventory months before the next season rolls around, which results in lost sales, steep markdowns, and consumer confusion, while fast-fashion companies often steal a march on slower movers, eating into the traditional players' revenues. The sheer number of fashion weeks has grown enormously over the years; more than 130 fashion weeks now occur annually around the world, as brands look to showcase their cruise/resort and pre-fall collections.

Efforts to reverse this situation are already underway. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, various groups of designers, brands, trade associations, and retailers—including organizations such as the CFDA and the British Fashion Council; brands such as Tory Bruch, Altuzarra, and Gucci; and retailers such as Saks Fifth Avenue and Nordstrom—have pledged to make significant changes in how they operate. Suggestions range from realigning fashion deliveries with actual seasons to delaying end-of-season markdowns to going seasonless.

Putting many of these suggestions into effect would entail overhauling the fashion calendar and rethinking the number of collections that brands produce each year—as well as changing when, where, and how designers show those collections and deliver them to retailers. “The excitement, energy, and community building during a runway show at NYFW is irreplaceable,” says one surveyed fashion brand executive. “Of course, it's still important to have live shows during NYFW, but that doesn't mean there aren't ways to improve the sustainability of the event.”

The amount of waste and excess built into the fashion calendar lies at the heart of the fashion industry's lack of sustainability. The industry currently releases about 1.2 billion tons of GHGs every year—close to 10% of total annual global emissions. People will consume more than 102 million tons of clothing over the next decade—up 60% from 2020—and 80% of it will end up in landfills. And research indicates that a single cotton T-shirt takes 2,700 liters of water to produce².

Consumers are by no means unaware of the industry's sustainability issues. Indeed, calls for change have come predominantly from fashion consumers. From the beginning

A fashion show runway with a red staircase and a crowd of people. The text is overlaid on the image.

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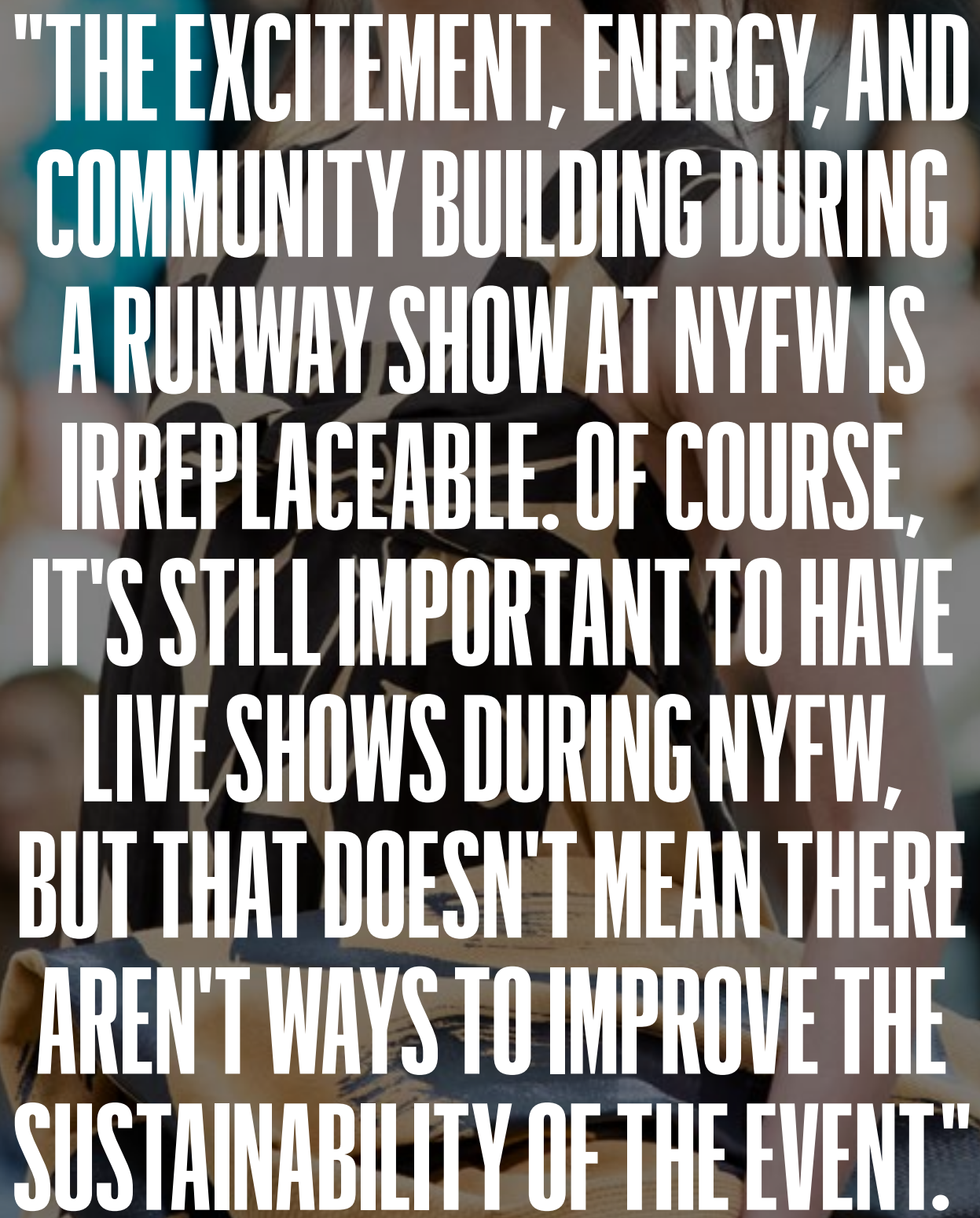
of 2010 through the first half of 2020, Google searches for “sustainable fashion” have increased by a factor of more than 12. And more than 60% of consumer participants in a recent BCG survey said that they would choose a more sustainable fashion and luxury brand over a less sustainable one. Among consumers and industry stakeholders alike, the sustainability conversation has shifted over the past few years from a discussion of general environmental issues in connection with the manufacturing of clothing to a more specific focus on the industry’s climate impact and its use of enormous amounts of water.

Meanwhile, the industry has made some progress toward greater sustainability. In 2017, the fashion and luxury industry’s Pulse Score (developed by BCG and the Global Fashion Agenda), which measures environmental and social performance on a 100-point scale, stood at just 32; by 2019, it had risen to 42, although its year-on-year trajectory actually flattened somewhat. This may be due in part to the tendency of some fashion brands to treat sustainability as a marketing tool, rather than fully committing to making necessary changes throughout their operations.

If the COVID-19 pandemic has had a silver lining on the fashion industry, it is that the reduction in consumer demand may serve as a wake-up call to move more quickly toward sustainability. The need for collective effort to survive the crisis is forcing industry players and consumers to realize that their actions—as individuals, company employees, and citizens—have real consequences. “Demand for sustainability from [fashion brands and designers] started to develop in the last three years,” says an executive at creative agency Probject. “Clients wanted to know how things were sourced, what happens to them afterward, how energy is used, and how to reduce their carbon emissions.”

As we emerge from this calamity, we hope that this understanding will reinvigorate the pursuit of sustainability across the industry.

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A woman with dark hair is shown from the chest up, wearing a black and white patterned jacket. She is holding a large, tan-colored tote bag with both hands. The background is a blurred crowd of people, suggesting a busy event like a fashion show. The text is overlaid in a large, bold, white font.

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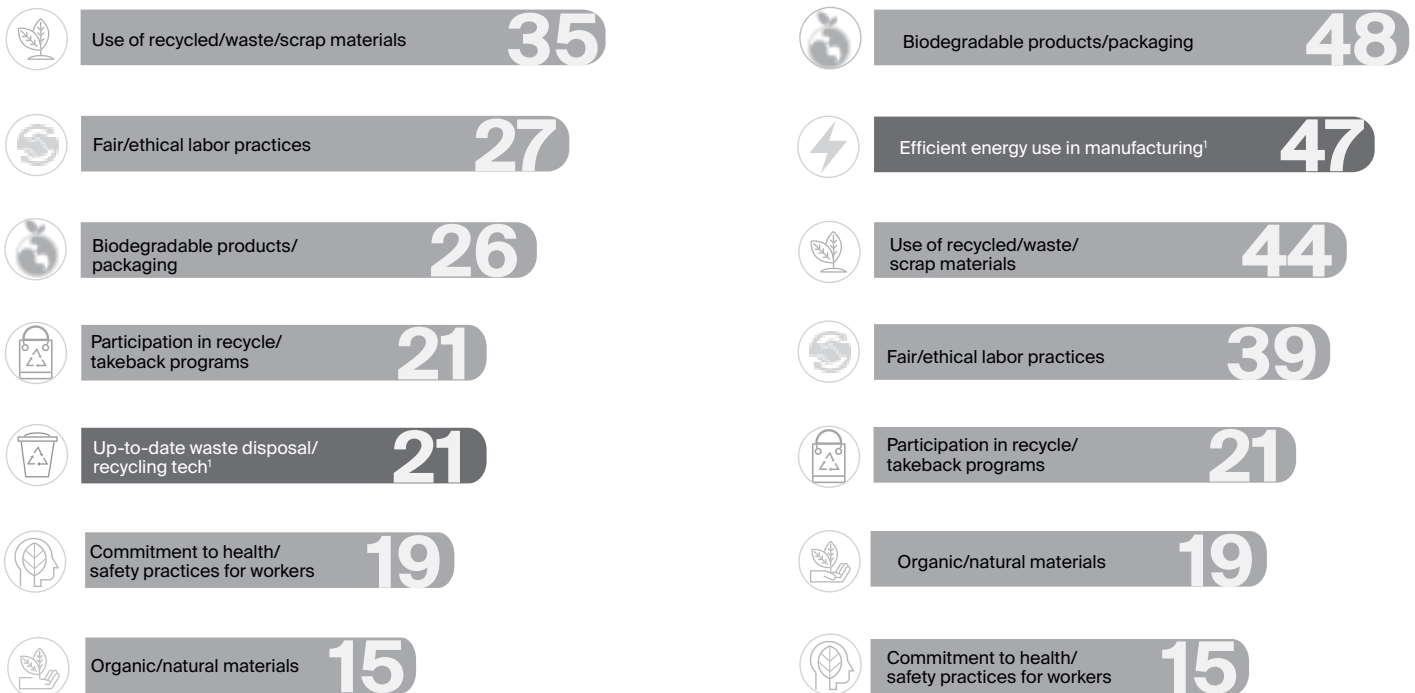
THE STATE OF PLAY

We recently surveyed various NYFW stakeholders—including designers, event planners, production houses, and public relations agencies—to gain a better sense of their attitudes toward and perceptions of sustainability. Overall, the responses were encouraging: more than half of all respondents said that they viewed sustainability as a social responsibility that fashion show organizers should fulfill, rather than as simply a means to stay relevant to consumers or to create value.

In terms of sustainability practices for the industry, NYFW actors and consumers tend to value the same dimensions but to varying degrees. (See Exhibit 1.) Use of recycled materials, biodegradability, and fair manufacturing practices are the top shared dimensions. Two points of difference are that consumers emphasize efficient energy use more than NYFW stakeholders do, while stakeholders have a greater interest in waste disposal and recycling technologies.

Almost three-quarters of NYFW stakeholders surveyed said that the companies they work for have sustainability targets for the materials they use, waste reduction, partnering with others dedicated to sustainability, and energy use. (See Exhibit 2.) But almost 40% of those with such targets view them only as a consideration in their planning strategies, not as a guiding principle. Among those without targets, 38% say that other issues drive decisions about their NYFW operations, and almost one-quarter note that it is difficult to set useful targets without having standards or measurement guidelines. (See Exhibit 3.)

EXHIBIT 1 | CONSUMERS AND NYFW STAKEHOLDERS VALUE THE SAME SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES, BUT TO VARYING DEGREES



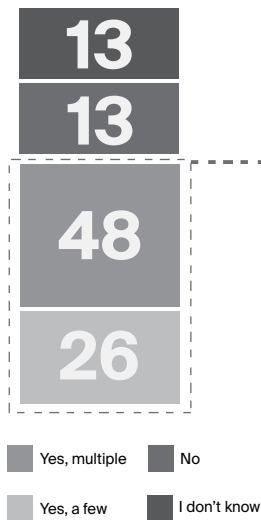
¹ Practices not listed as top 10 across both brands and consumers

Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey, BCG Sustainability Survey December 2019.

EXHIBIT 2 | NYFW STAKEHOLDERS WITH SUSTAINABILITY TARGETS FOCUS ON MATERIALS AND WASTE

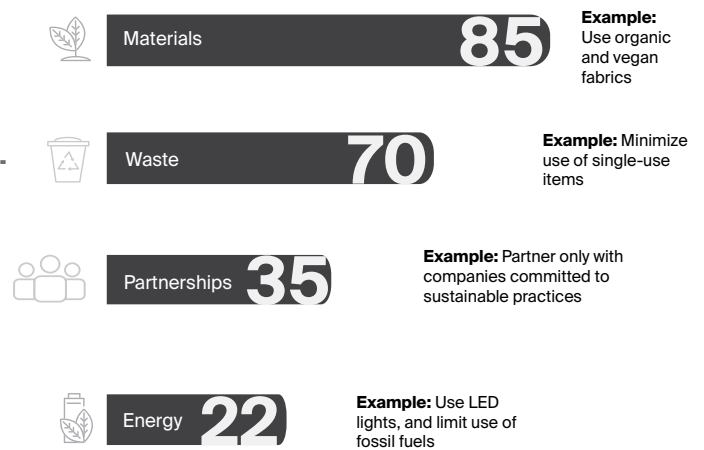
Q: Are there **sustainability-related** targets specific to NYFW within your organization?

Percentage of respondents (%)



Q: For **which** of the following **sustainability dimensions** are targets defined, specific to NYFW?

Percentage of respondents who have targets (%)



Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey.

EXHIBIT 3 | NYFW STAKEHOLDERS WHO LACK SUSTAINABILITY TARGETS STRUGGLE TO SET THEM, AND CITE OTHER FACTORS AS DRIVERS OF DECISION MAKING

Q: What is the reason for the **absence** of sustainability-related targets for NYFW in your organization?

Percentage of respondents who don't have targets (%)

Sustainability is a part of the organizing team's agenda, but it's not top of mind , and other factors drive decision making	38
Sustainability is a part of the organizing team's agenda, but it's difficult to set targets (no framework/standards to look to for guidance or measurement)	25
Sustainability is not a part of the organizing team's agenda because we lack the time and resources to pursue it	25
Sustainability is a part of the organizing team's agenda but it is not considered necessary to translate this into particular targets	13
Sustainability is not a part of the organizing team's agenda due to lack of awareness or indifference toward sustainability in NYFW	0

Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey.

Companies that have made concerted efforts to boost their sustainability practices during NYFW have reduced their environmental impact considerably. Burberry, Dior, Gucci, Ralph Lauren and other fashion houses use recycled wood in their sets, send out digital invitations, travel in electric vehicles, and use partnerships to offset their remaining carbon emissions. Missoni and Saint Laurent use energy-efficient LED lighting powered by biofuel-burning generators at the show.

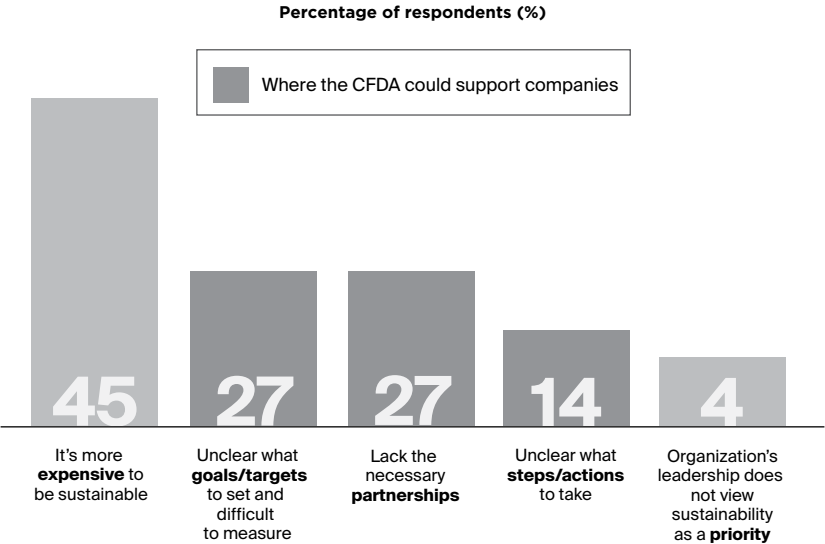
Fashion weeks around the world are attempting to boost their sustainability, too. As early as 2013, for example, London Fashion Week established its Positive Fashion initiative to

encourage brands to promote positive change in all their business decisions. More recently, Mercedes Benz Fashion Week Australia announced a three-year plan to embed sustainable practices in all its event and venue operations. The state of New South Wales granted the organizers \$150,000 in support of the effort. Overall, although fewer than 10% of brands offset their carbon emissions from NYFW, those that made the effort succeeded in offsetting them fully.

Still, stakeholders interested in boosting NYFW's sustainability concede that they face a number of challenges, notably with regard to setting suitable targets and budgeting for additional costs. (See Exhibit 4.)

EXHIBIT 4 | TIGHT BUDGETS AND UNCLEAR SUSTAINABILITY GOALS/TARGETS SERVE AS THE GREATEST CHALLENGE FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE DURING NYFW

Q: In your opinion, what are the **greatest obstacles** your organization faces in moving toward sustainability for NYFW?
Choose 2 at most.



“ We're working on being more energy efficient. Backstage, we use LED lights everywhere, but we're not using LED lights on the runway yet because it is very **expensive**.

– Production house

Arranging for transportation of guests between the show and events is quite **expensive**.

– Fashion brand

Although we've done a lot to be more sustainable, it's **hard to set targets and actually measure** how much we've reduced our environmental impact.”

– Fashion brand

Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey.



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ASSESSING THE IMPACT

To make NYFW more sustainable, stakeholders must fully understand and measure its environmental impact. To this end, we analyzed six impact areas and functions that must come together to help NYFW achieve maximum impact in four dimensions of sustainability.

In the area of transportation, for example, embracing alternatives such as ride sharing and public transportation can help reduce carbon emissions. And in the areas of

content and samples, post-event reuse can significantly reduce waste. (See Exhibit 5.)

We used this framework to measure NYFW's current level of sustainability across the six specified impact areas—a level that will serve as a baseline for future assessments of the event's progress. NYFW stakeholders have already taken numerous steps to increase their sustainability, resulting in an overall NYFW sustainability impact score of 53 out of 100. Exhibit 6 summarizes the results of this analysis and includes NYFW's current score in each of the six impact areas. Topping the list is production, with an impact score of 67; transportation/logistics is the weakest element, at just 36.

A closer look at each impact area will reveal its present status and suggest what can be done to improve its sustainability impact score.

EXHIBIT 5 | STRATEGIC CHANGES ACROSS SIX IMPACT AREAS AND FOUR SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS CAN REDUCE NYFW'S ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

Not exhaustive

		NYFW impact areas					
Sustainability dimensions		Content ¹	Sample	Production	Venue	Public relations	Transportation/logistics ²
	Energy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital livestream or showrooms Moved from runway to presentation Selective use of photography/video 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Renewable energy when producing NY-based production (CFDA Fashion Manufacturing Initiative) Fewer rush orders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LED lighting on set Renewable or low-carbon generator Local equipment, lighting, set 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnerships with other brands to reduce distance between shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reduce events outside main show 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ride sharing or carpool Electronic car fleets from partners Public transport options
	Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recycled paper in brochures, look books 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nontoxic materials Manufacturers' material choice, certification, labor conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compostable and recyclable materials Restaurant or caterer selections (organic, local) 	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
	Waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reuse of content or assets Digital look books for buyers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Single-use garment bags or hangers Post-show reuse of samples Less packaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reuse of décor, props, sets (vs. single use) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Water-filling stations (vs. plastic bottles) Recycle bins 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Digital invitations (vs. paper) Recyclable or no gift bags 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No plastic water bottles in car service
	Partnerships ³	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with local artists, photographers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Donation of unused materials 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Partnership with collectors of show waste 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> "Green" building and facilities (LEED, BREEAM, etc.) Shared use of venue (e.g., show and party) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organized events increasing awareness of sustainability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use of carbon-emission offsetting agencies Hotels with sustainable practices

¹ Includes content generation and dispersion. ² Specific to guest transportation. ³ Community and external partnerships. **Source:** BCG analysis.

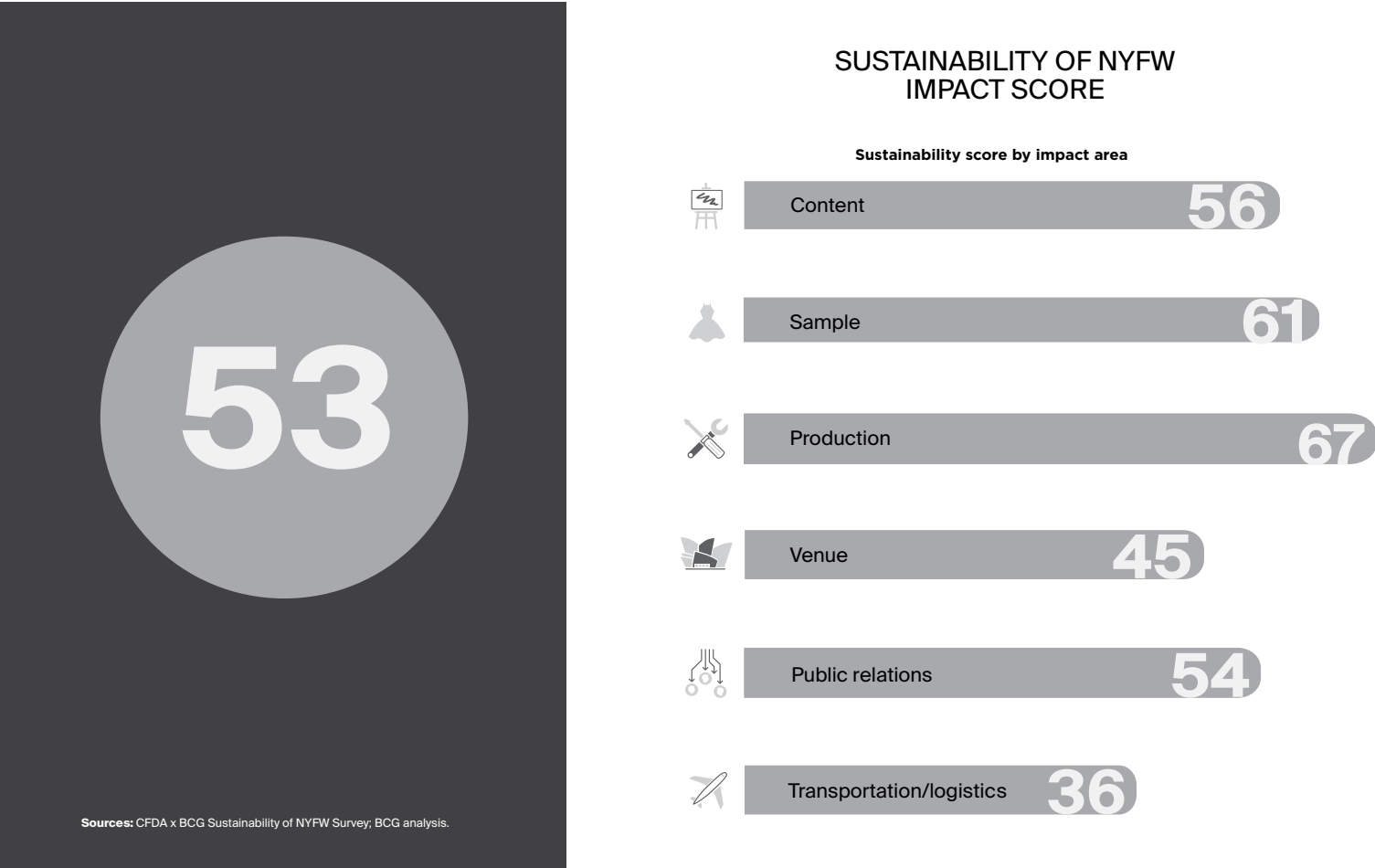
CONTENT. This impact area, which includes all still and video assets, literature, and other materials created for the show and used afterward, scores fairly well. The vast majority of stakeholders already leverage NYFW content to market their brands elsewhere, reducing the number of subsequent shoots needed. And almost all of them partner with local photographers and artists to minimize carbon emissions generated from travel.

The greatest opportunity for content-related improvements at future NYFWs lies in partnerships between stakeholders to create content that promotes sustainability. Participants should also consider leveraging digital and other alternative formats during their NYFW shows to limit the creation of physical waste. “The runway and scenic environment are maximized to create a season worth of content, therefore reducing the impact of shoots elsewhere,” notes an executive at

production house and PR firm KCD. “It’s an inspiring moment when brands and their creative teams and top talent can collaborate during fashion week, generating content assets that live well beyond the runway show.”

SAMPLES. Many current participants at NYFW are small brands that already employ sustainable practices in their design rooms and material sourcing, which helps explain why this impact area scores relatively well. Indeed, the vast majority of fashion designers are highly conscious of the need to minimize waste related to samples shown at NYFW, opting to use recycled materials and to reuse and repurpose samples and fabrics after the show or event. “Half of the waste or more is already being generated at the design table,” notes designer Gabriela Hearst. “But being sustainable is not more expensive; in fact, being conscious of waste has helped me reduce costs at my company.”

EXHIBIT 6 | NYFW SCORES 53 OUT OF 100 ON OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY, BUT THE SCORES FOR INDIVIDUAL IMPACT AREAS VARY CONSIDERABLY



Some designers are also reducing the number of samples they create specifically for NYFW, by presenting their ideas to retailers in digital form rather than via physical shows. Most fashion brands also try to make their samples out of sustainable fabrics produced by ethical manufacturers. “As an industry, we should be more willing to share resources and be less protective,” notes designer Maria Cornejo. “For example, if one designer discovers a supplier with hyper-sustainable fabric, they should share that with other designers to help push the overall industry toward sustainability.”

The sustainability dimension with the most room for improvement in this area is the energy used in making samples. More designers could leverage renewable energy sources when producing samples and choose more sustainable methods of shipping them.

PRODUCTION. NYFW achieves its highest sustainability scores in the production of its shows and events. Fashion brands and production houses alike are endeavoring to reduce waste by repurposing and reusing set materials, props, and décor during and after the show. Most stakeholders are also conscious of the sourcing of their catering and materials, actively pursuing organic, natural, and locally sourced options.

As with the other impact areas, however, reducing energy use remains a challenge. Most participants are working with local partners to minimize their carbon footprint, rather than flying in artisans and other vendors from far away. But they could increase their efforts to use renewable and clean energy sources on set, and they should compensate for any unavoidable emissions they create during the week.

VENUES. NYFW’s many activities occur at multiple venues across the city, and this impact area has significant room for improvement. Some venues have higher sustainability standards than others, as evidenced by the certification that groups such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) and the Building Research Establishment through its BREEAM standard have awarded to some—but by no means all—NYFW

venues. Many participants have already taken steps to reduce waste in venues, such as by promoting recycling and eliminating single-use plastic water bottles.

Few stakeholders, however, use their runway venues for the other events that they hold during NYFW, share their venues with other brands to pool resources, or work with other brands to minimize the distance between venues. In addition to exploring these possibilities, brands should seek ways to ensure that their show venues are more energy efficient—notably, by finding facilities that comply with green energy standards.

PUBLIC RELATIONS. Many NYFW stakeholders are adopting measures to reduce the waste that their PR activities generate. For example, they are shifting to digital invitations for events and are providing recyclable gift bags or forgoing gift bags entirely.

Stakeholders should use their PR skills and networks to reinforce and promote NYFW’s sustainability, declining sponsorships from companies with poor sustainability records and partnering with other brands to promote responsible practices during NYFW.

TRANSPORTATION/LOGISTICS. Most of the carbon emissions generated during NYFW arise from transporting people and equipment to the show and to and from its many venues. Some participants try to reduce these emissions by consolidating travel between events, offering shuttles, ferries, and other ride-sharing options. Although carbon offsetting remains a controversial response to the problem, a few participants do offset the emissions that their air travel to each fashion week generates, which is by far the largest source of the events’ GHG emissions. But only a handful have sought partnerships with sustainable hotels and car fleets to minimize their carbon footprint. More partnerships between NYFW stakeholders and transportation and hospitality providers—for example, to encourage or provide ride sharing for attendees—would go a long way toward increasing NYFW’s sustainability. “Driving NYFW toward sustainability requires a united effort from the fashion community and the City of New York,” says one IMG executive.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing glasses and a yellow shirt, is shown in profile, looking out over a city skyline. The background is a clear blue sky with some light clouds. The text is overlaid on the image in a large, bold, white font.

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TAKING ACTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has forced stakeholders in NYFW to rethink their approach to the event and to reassess their commitment to its sustainability. The time is ripe to move forward on both fronts simultaneously, putting into practice long-debated actions that this research has validated. Many actions taken in support of sustainability will have the added benefit of saving money at a time when budgets across the industry are especially tight; indeed, according to BCG estimates, the global fashion industry is facing a pandemic-related decline in revenue of between \$480 billion and \$640 billion.

We expect to see stakeholders respond to the crisis by experimenting with various digital formats and other innovative ways of presenting their fashion ideas and products, in keeping with ongoing social distancing limitations and budgetary constraints. Many sustainability practices that we have identified in this report (such as in the production of samples, the creation of sets for alternative formats, and the reuse of content for marketing purposes) will also apply to these formats, making them even more sustainable.

But this effort alone will not enable New York's fashion sector or the US fashion industry as a whole to meet its sustainability goals in the longer term. To get there, all stakeholders must begin collecting and analyzing the data needed to continuously assess their progress toward clearly

defined goals. This will require a three-step approach:

STEP 1: MEASURE. Before doing anything else, determine the key metrics to be tracked. These might include the quantity of carbon emissions, the amount of waste generated, the percentage of sustainable/recycled materials in samples, and the percentage of set materials reused during shows. Then measure each of these metrics. The CFDA can support this effort by conducting pilot programs with select NYFW stakeholders and by facilitating partnerships with agencies that specialize in measuring CO₂ emissions and with organizations that have expertise in assessing sustainability.

STEP 2: REDUCE. Set targets and identify ways to reduce emissions and waste, and reuse materials in each relevant impact area. Efforts might include increasing the proportion of recycled and upcycled content in samples, providing water fountains instead of plastic bottles at venues, and offering ride-sharing options for attendees. Ensure that measurement efforts keep track of progress made. NYFW actors should monitor key targets such as the reduction in carbon emissions; the decline in water bottles, garment bags, and other single-use items; and the increase in the percentage of materials reused after the show. Future NYFW sustainability surveys will track the evolution of stakeholder performance on these measures. (The Playbook at the end of this article provides detailed recommendations for improving NYFW's sustainability.)

STEP 3: COMPENSATE. The NYFW's carbon footprint is by far the weakest link in its sustainability chain, so the final step is to offset all emissions that stakeholders cannot avoid releasing. This entails supporting programs that either reduce GHG emissions or remove CO₂ directly from the atmosphere.

Meanwhile, NYFW stakeholders must continue looking for ways to compensate for other practices that diminish NYFW's sustainability in any of the six impact areas.

ORGANIZING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The CFDA has a critical role to play in supporting the sustainability goals of NYFW and the broader fashion industry. (See Exhibit 7.) Although it cannot mandate how its members operate, it can establish clear sustainability guidelines and goals, educate its members about how to meet them, and provide the resources needed to do so. Says one surveyed brand executive: “The CFDA can play a more active part in educating designers, giving them easy access to sustainability resources, for example.”





The CFDA can also coordinate the sustainability efforts of its member brands and facilitate conversations between the fashion industry and local and regional governments about how the industry can help meet policy goals. In Europe, for example, the apparel industry’s Policy Hub and BCG have developed a post-pandemic recovery plan that combines economic growth with the creation of a sustainable circular fashion industry economy, in line with the EU’s European Green Deal. And the CFDA can promote sustainability by encouraging partnerships between NYFW stakeholders and throughout the fashion industry. As one surveyed fashion designer notes, “the CFDA could point to catering companies that have sustainable practices for partnerships, for example.”

THE LARGER PICTURE: NYFW and the other fashion weeks that occur around the world demonstrate the industry’s need to increase its sustainability. Concerns about NYFW’s sustainability are now top of mind among its stakeholders—not to mention among the consumers whose pocketbooks and devotion to fashion support the industry. As such, NYFW can serve as a valuable symbol of the industry’s efforts to become more sustainable.

But it must become more than that. Much work remains to be done to ensure that the industry reduces waste, uses less water, and becomes carbon neutral. In the longer term, the industry should unite in support of such efforts as transparent consumer-facing product certification and standardization, comprehensive materials databases, and the digitization of its operations across the board. As a strong advocate of such initiatives, the CFDA is already working with the UN Office for Partnerships and the Conscious Fashion Campaign in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Like the fashion industry as a whole, NYFW generates an outsize amount of attention in the media and within its enormous consumer base. Its success in meeting its sustainability goals will have a similarly outsize effect on the global commitment to sustainability. Let’s keep up the good work.

EXHIBIT 7 | THE CFDA CAN TAKE STRATEGIC ACTION TO BOOST NYFW’S SUSTAINABILITY

CFDA action	Immediate (~ 1 year)	Near term (2-3 years)	Long term (3+ years)
 Educate and offer resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate NYFW stakeholders on sustainability (Impact Report and Playbook) Establish an award for designers incorporating sustainability into their shows/designs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide directories (specific to producers, production, PR needs) for sustainable materials in samples and sets, venues, catering/restaurant options, and hotels Establish an official CFDA digital platform for livestreaming shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a deadstock database for brands to leverage when putting together samples Offer a centralized storage facility for brands to house set materials for reuse from prior shows
 Coordinate across brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage brands to share resources during NYFW, including venues, equipment, and crews Pilot measurement for carbon emissions with a selected representative group of brands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate show locations across brands to minimize guests’ travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize transportation for post-show materials (to be recycled, composted, etc.)
 Establish guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban single-use plastic items From NYFW Develop a “quick wins” toolkit for producers for sustainable events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorse existing sustainability guidelines (e.g., Sustainable Apparel Coalition) to promote sustainability during NYFW 	
 Develop and facilitate partnerships		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend and facilitate introductions to partners for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon measurement and offsetting Digital livestreaming Energy-efficient resources Reuse of materials for samples and sets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve local government in championing sustainability during NYFW (monetary support, outreach support) Partner with local government on waste disposal, and on recycling or reusing materials



**"THE CFDA CAN PLAY A
MORE ACTIVE PART IN
EDUCATING DESIGNERS,
GIVING THEM EASY ACCESS
TO SUSTAINABILITY
RESOURCES, FOR EXAMPLE."**

NYFW SUSTAINABILITY PLAYBOOK








This document is designed to serve as a guide and a resource in supporting the NYFW community—fashion brands, production houses, event planners, PR agencies, and others—in their efforts to move toward a more sustainable NYFW.

The recommendations outlined below cover six sustainability impact areas and four sustainability dimensions. We have ranked the recommended actions by ease of accomplishment within each impact area.

We hope that these specific steps and actions help you achieve greater sustainability around your NYFW activities, and for your organization overall.

THE NYFW SUSTAINABILITY PLAYBOOK

Content

Action	Ease to achieve
 Offer digital look books (for buyers/partners) in lieu of physical look books	■
 Generate content/assets from NYFW to use for other brand marketing purposes	■
 Opt for a reduced audience with digital presentation/livestream of the runway show	■
 Livestream the runway show (for clienteling/other marketing purposes)	■
 Partner with local artists and photographers to reduce travel	■
 Partner with other organizations to generate content for awareness of sustainability	■
 Consider alternative formats for shows and events (e.g., private showings, film/video)	■













Sustainability dimension

 Waste	 Materials
 Energy	 Partnerships

Ease to achieve












■ Easy	■ Moderate	■ Hard
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Samples






Action	Ease to achieve
 Use reusable/recyclable packaging items (garment bags vs. single use)	■
 Minimize waste generation (samples, packaging)	■
 Partner with manufacturers with ethical labor practices	■
 Use or partner with manufacturers who use sustainably sourced materials	■
 Minimize the number of rush orders/changes	■
 Don't use fur or exotic skins in samples	■
 Choose ground/sea travel to (vs. air) for shipping	■
 Use and push forward recycled/upcycled materials	■
 Reuse, repurpose, recycle, upcycle, and donate as much as possible after the show	■
 Use renewable energy sources for production	■
 Leverage digital resources in lieu of physical, whenever applicable	■
 Produce samples locally (CFDA/FMI NY)	■

NYFW SUSTAINABILITY PLAYBOOK

Production

Action	Ease to achieve
 Rent materials (vs. buy)	Easy
 Use hair and makeup products with minimal or recyclable packaging	Easy
 Partner with collectors of show waste	Easy
 Use organic/natural makeup and hair products	Easy
 Serve organic/locally sourced food and beverages	Easy
 Partner with restaurants/caterers that offer organic/locally sourced food/goods	Easy
 Partner with suppliers who source set materials sustainably	Easy
 Partner with local vendors/artisans	Easy
 Reuse materials from prior shows	Easy
 Reuse/repurpose/recycle/upcycle/donate materials after the show/events	Easy
 Use recycled/upcycled/recyclable/compostable materials (vs. plastic)	Easy
 Use low-carbon/renewable energy sources	Easy
 Minimize/offset the carbon emissions generated from transportation related to production	Easy

Venue

Action	Ease to achieve
 Eliminate single-use plastic bottles (offer water filling stations or sustainably packaged water)	Easy
 Encourage recycling onsite by placing recycle bins both onsite and backstage	Easy
 Choose a venue location that complies with "green" energy standards	Easy
 Repurpose the venue post-show for other events (e.g., reception, parties)	Easy
 Partner with other brands to minimize distance between shows, or share venue with other brands	Hard






Sustainability dimension



Ease to achieve



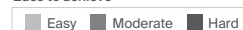
Public relations

Action	Ease to achieve
 Eliminate paper invitations and show notes; opt for digital distribution instead	Easy
 Use recycled materials in physical invitations	Easy
 Minimize waste in relation to gifts to guests; eliminate gift bags or give recyclable gifts	Easy
 Partner with organizations to put on events promoting awareness of sustainability	Easy
 Do not accept sponsorships from brands that do not have sustainable practices	Easy






Sustainability dimension



Ease to achieve



Transportation/logistics

Action	Ease to achieve
 Partner with hotels with sustainable practices	Easy
 Consolidate guest, team, and model travel as much as possible	Easy
 Offset the carbon emissions generated from air travel of guests, teams, and models	Easy
 Offset the carbon emissions generated from ground travel of guests, teams, and models	Easy
 Partner with car fleets powered by electricity to transport guests	Easy

A fashion model with dark hair pulled back, wearing a shimmering, sequined dress, stands in the center of the frame. The background is dark with numerous out-of-focus, golden-yellow light spots, creating a bokeh effect. The text is overlaid in the center, partially obscuring the model's torso.

**"DRIVING NYFW TOWARD
SUSTAINABILITY REQUIRES
A UNITED EFFORT FROM THE
FASHION COMMUNITY AND
THE CITY OF NEW YORK."**

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The Council of Fashion Designers of America, Inc. (CFDA) is a not-for-profit trade association founded in 1962 with a membership of 477 of America's foremost womenswear, menswear, jewelry, and accessory designers. The organization provides its Members with timely and relevant thought-leadership and business development support. Emerging designers and students are supported through professional development programming and numerous grant and scholarship opportunities. In addition to hosting the annual CFDA Fashion Awards, the organization owns the Fashion Calendar and is the organizer of the Official New York Fashion Week Schedule. The CFDA Foundation, Inc. is a separate, not-for-profit organized to mobilize the membership to raise funds for charitable causes and engage in civic initiatives.

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THANK YOU

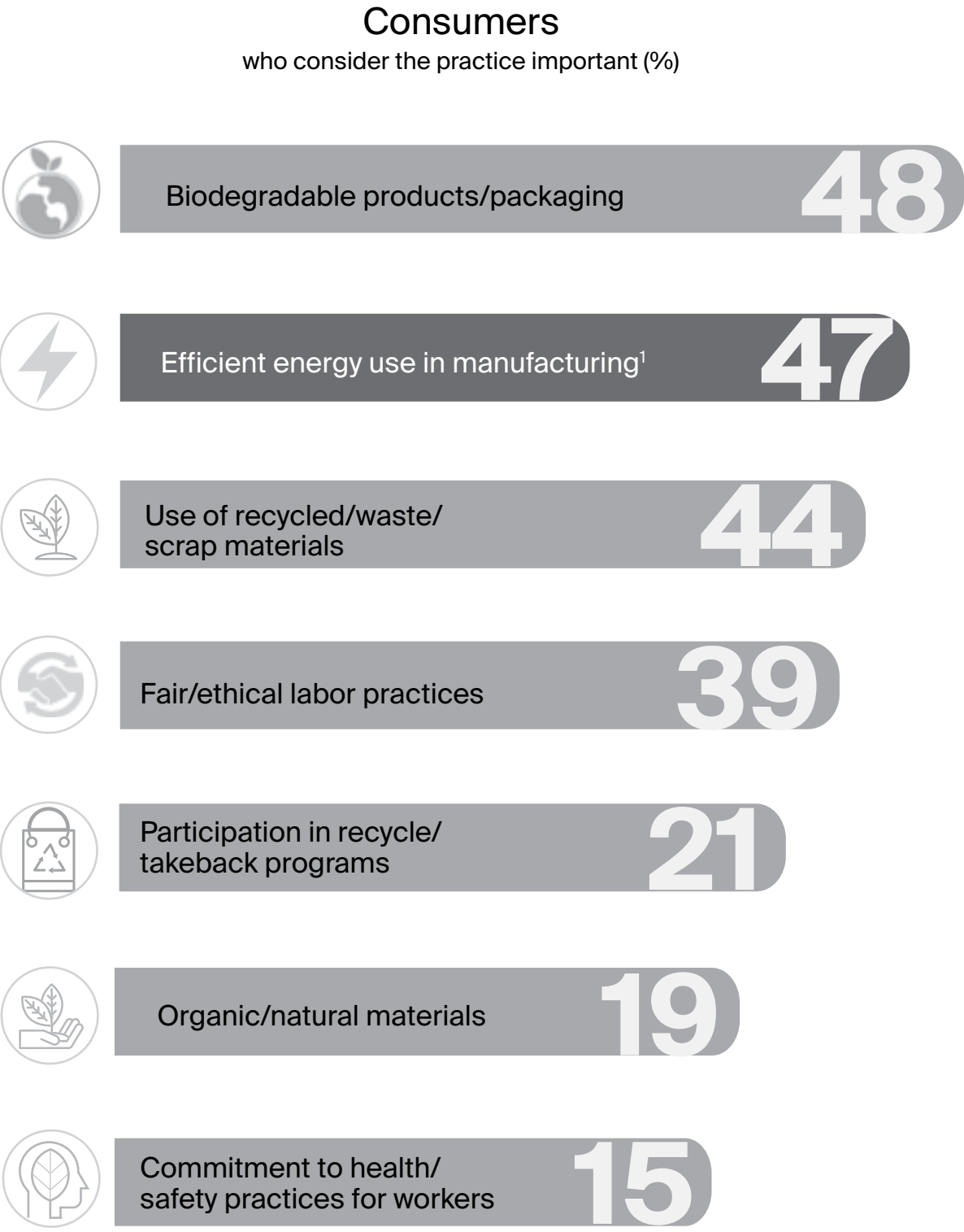
¹ “The Economic Impact of the Fashion Industry,” Congresswoman Carolyn B. Maloney (U.S. Congress Joint Economic Committee, 2019)
https://www.jec.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/39201d61-aec8-4458-80e8-2fe26ee8a31e/economic-impact-of-the-fashion-industry.pdf.

² BCG estimates based on data from Common Objective, Better Cotton Initiative, Ellen MacArthur Foundation, UNFCCC, and expert interviews.

The Council of Fashion Designers of America in partnership with Boston Consulting Group

APPENDIX

EXHIBIT 1 | CONSUMERS AND NYFW STAKEHOLDERS VALUE THE SAME SUSTAINABILITY PRACTICES, BUT TO VARYING DEGREES

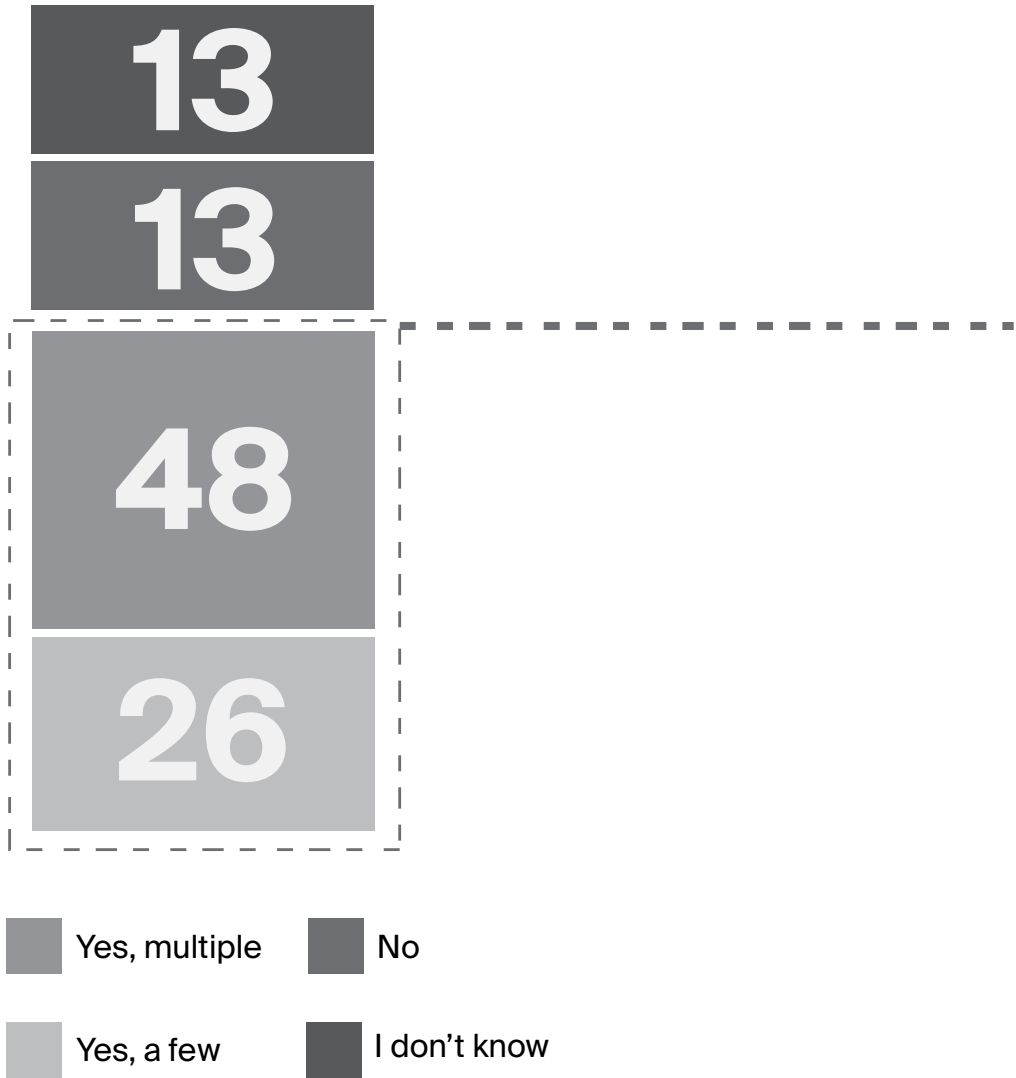


¹ Practices not listed as top 10 across both brands and consumers
Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey. BCG Sustainability Survey December 2019.

EXHIBIT 2 | NYFW STAKEHOLDERS WITH SUSTAINABILITY TARGETS
FOCUS ON MATERIALS AND WASTE

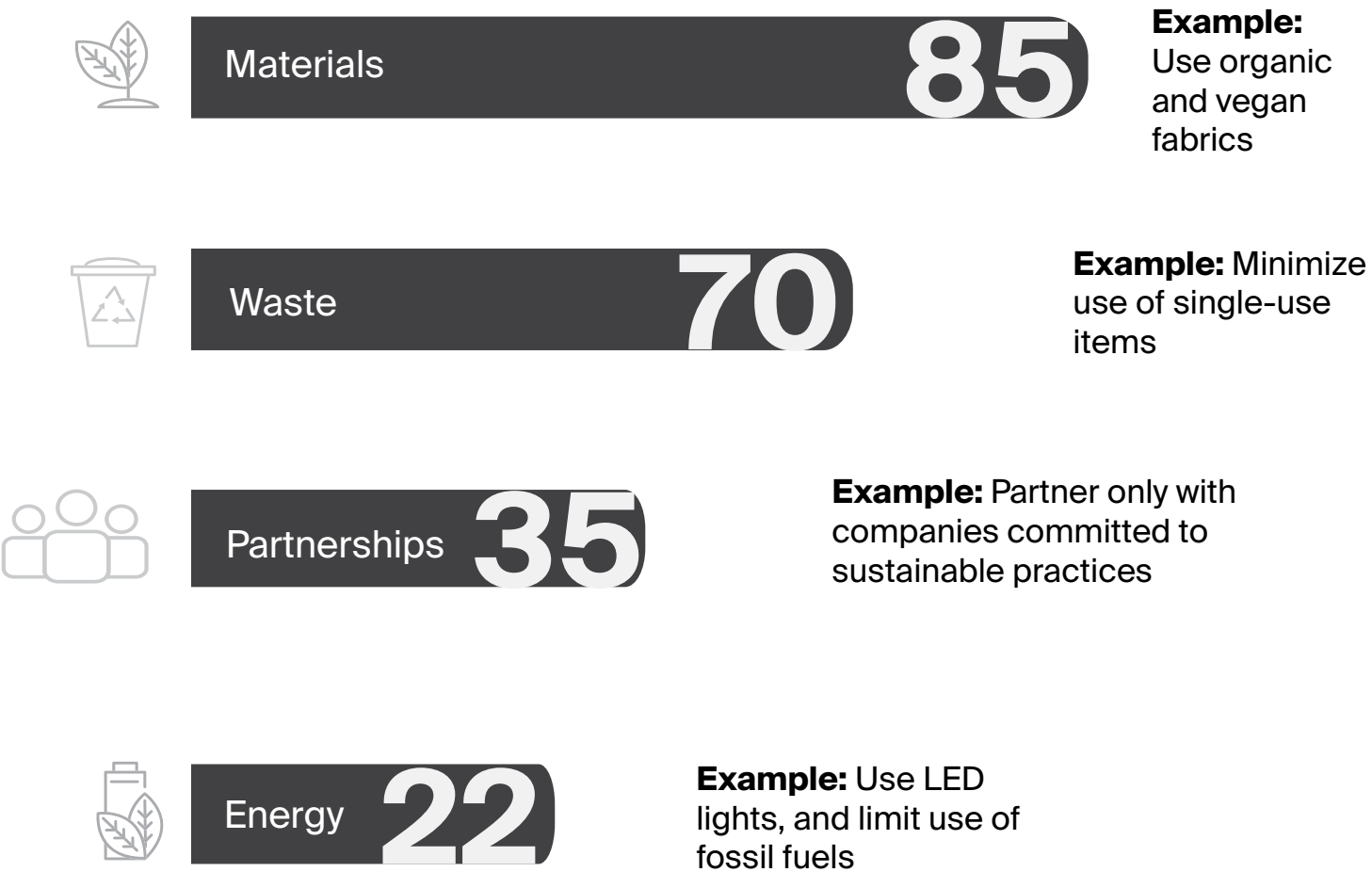
Q: Are there **sustainability-related** targets specific to NYFW within your organization?

Percentage of respondents (%)



Q: For **which** of the following **sustainability dimensions** are targets defined, specific to NYFW?

Percentage of respondents who have targets (%)



Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey.

EXHIBIT 3 | NYFW STAKEHOLDERS WHO LACK SUSTAINABILITY TARGETS STRUGGLE TO SET THEM, AND CITE OTHER FACTORS AS DRIVERS OF DECISION MAKING

Q: What is the reason for the **absence** of sustainability-related targets for NYFW in your organization?

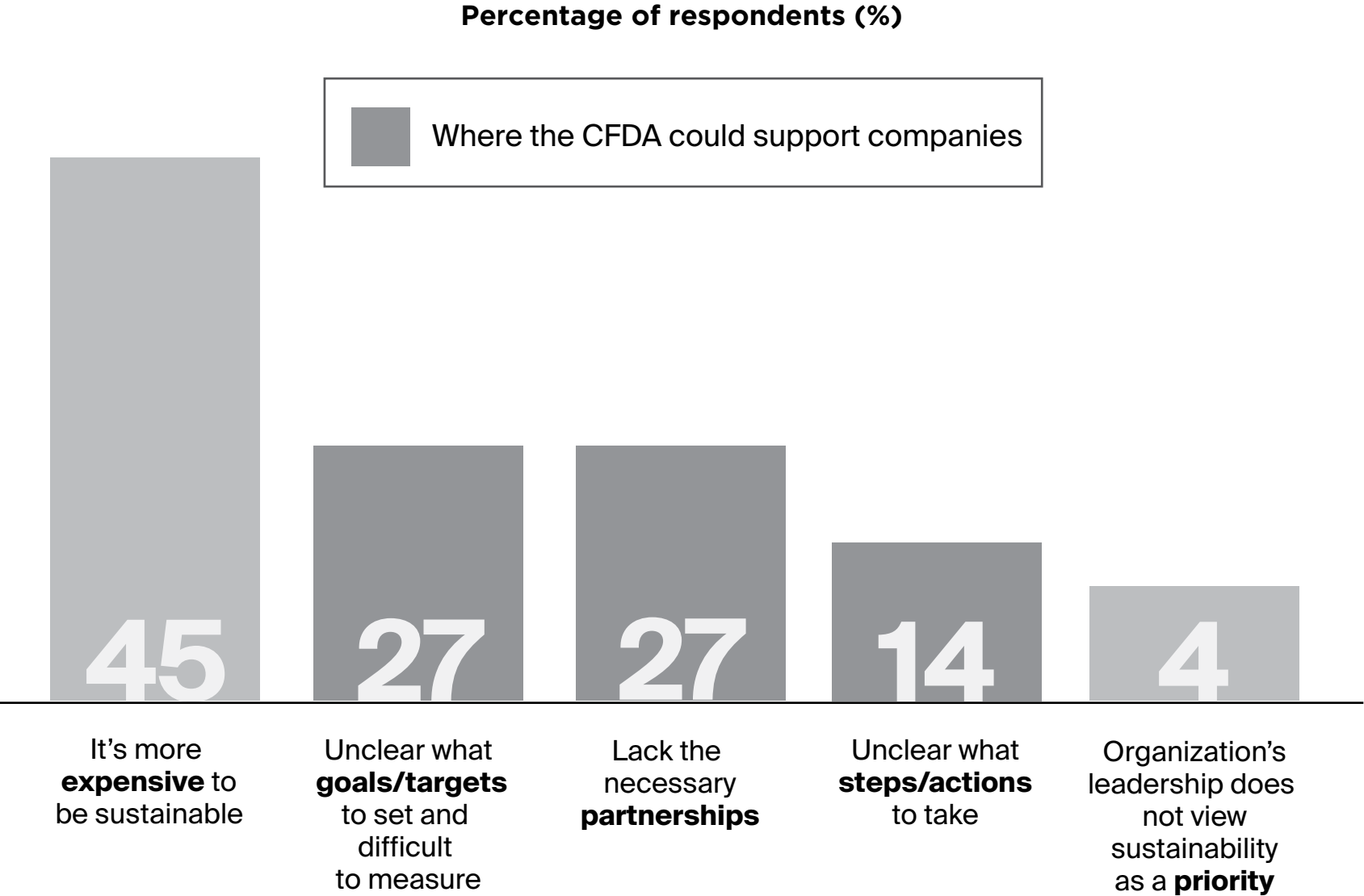
Percentage of respondents who don't have targets (%)

Sustainability is a part of the organizing team's agenda, but it's not top of mind , and other factors drive decision making	38
Sustainability is a part of the organizing team's agenda, but it's difficult to set targets (no framework/ standards to look to for guidance or measurement)	25
Sustainability is not a part of the organizing team's agenda because we lack the time and resources to pursue it	25
Sustainability is a part of the organizing team's agenda but it is not considered necessary to translate this into particular targets	13
Sustainability is not a part of the organizing team's agenda due to lack of awareness or indifference toward sustainability in NYFW	0

Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey.

EXHIBIT 4 | TIGHT BUDGETS AND UNCLEAR SUSTAINABILITY GOALS/TARGETS SERVE AS THE GREATEST CHALLENGES FOR STAKEHOLDERS TO BECOME MORE SUSTAINABLE DURING NYFW

Q: In your opinion, what are the **greatest obstacles** your organization faces in moving toward sustainability for NYFW?
Choose 2 at most.



“ We're working on being more energy efficient. Backstage, we use LED lights everywhere, but we're not using LED lights on the runway yet because it is very **expensive**.

– Production house

Arranging for transportation of guests between the show and events is quite **expensive**.

– Fashion brand

Although we've done a lot to be more sustainable, it's **hard to set targets and actually measure** how much we've reduced our environmental impact.”

– Fashion brand ”

Source: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey.





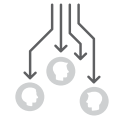





EXHIBIT 5 | STRATEGIC CHANGES ACROSS SIX IMPACT AREAS AND FOUR SUSTAINABILITY DIMENSIONS CAN REDUCE NYFW’S ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT

Not exhaustive

↑

Sustainability dimensions

↓

	← NYFW impact areas →					
	Content ¹ 	Sample 	Production 	Venue 	Public relations 	Transportation/ logistics ² 
<div>Energy</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital livestream or showrooms• Moved from runway to presentation• Selective use of photography/video	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Renewable energy when producing• NY-based production (CFDA Fashion Manufacturing Initiative)• Fewer rush orders	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• LED lighting on set• Renewable or low-carbon generator• Local equipment, lighting, set	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnerships with other brands to reduce distance between shows	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reduce events outside main show	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ride sharing or carpool• Electronic car fleets from partners• Public transport options
<div>Materials</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Recycled paper in brochures, look books	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nontoxic materials• Manufacturers’ material choice, certification, labor conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Compostable and recyclable materials• Restaurant or caterer selections (organic, local)	Not applicable	Not applicable	Not applicable
<div>Waste</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reuse of content or assets• Digital look books for buyers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Single-use garment bags or hangers• Post-show reuse of samples• Less packaging	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reuse of décor, props, sets (vs. single use)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Water-filling stations (vs. plastic bottles)• Recycle bins	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Digital invitations (vs. paper)• Recyclable or no gift bags	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No plastic water bottles in car service
<div>Partnerships ³</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnership with local artists, photographers	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Donation of unused materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Partnership with collectors of show waste	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Green” building and facilities (LEED, BREEAM, etc.)• Shared use of venue (e.g., show and party)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Organized events increasing awareness of sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of carbon-emission offsetting agencies• Hotels with sustainable practices

¹ Includes content generation and dispersion. ² Specific to guest transportation. ³ Community and external partnerships. **Source:** BCG analysis.

**EXHIBIT 6 | NYFW SCORES 53 OUT OF 100 ON OVERALL SUSTAINABILITY,
BUT THE SCORES FOR INDIVIDUAL IMPACT AREAS VARY CONSIDERABLY**



Sources: CFDA x BCG Sustainability of NYFW Survey; BCG analysis.

**SUSTAINABILITY OF NYFW
IMPACT SCORE**

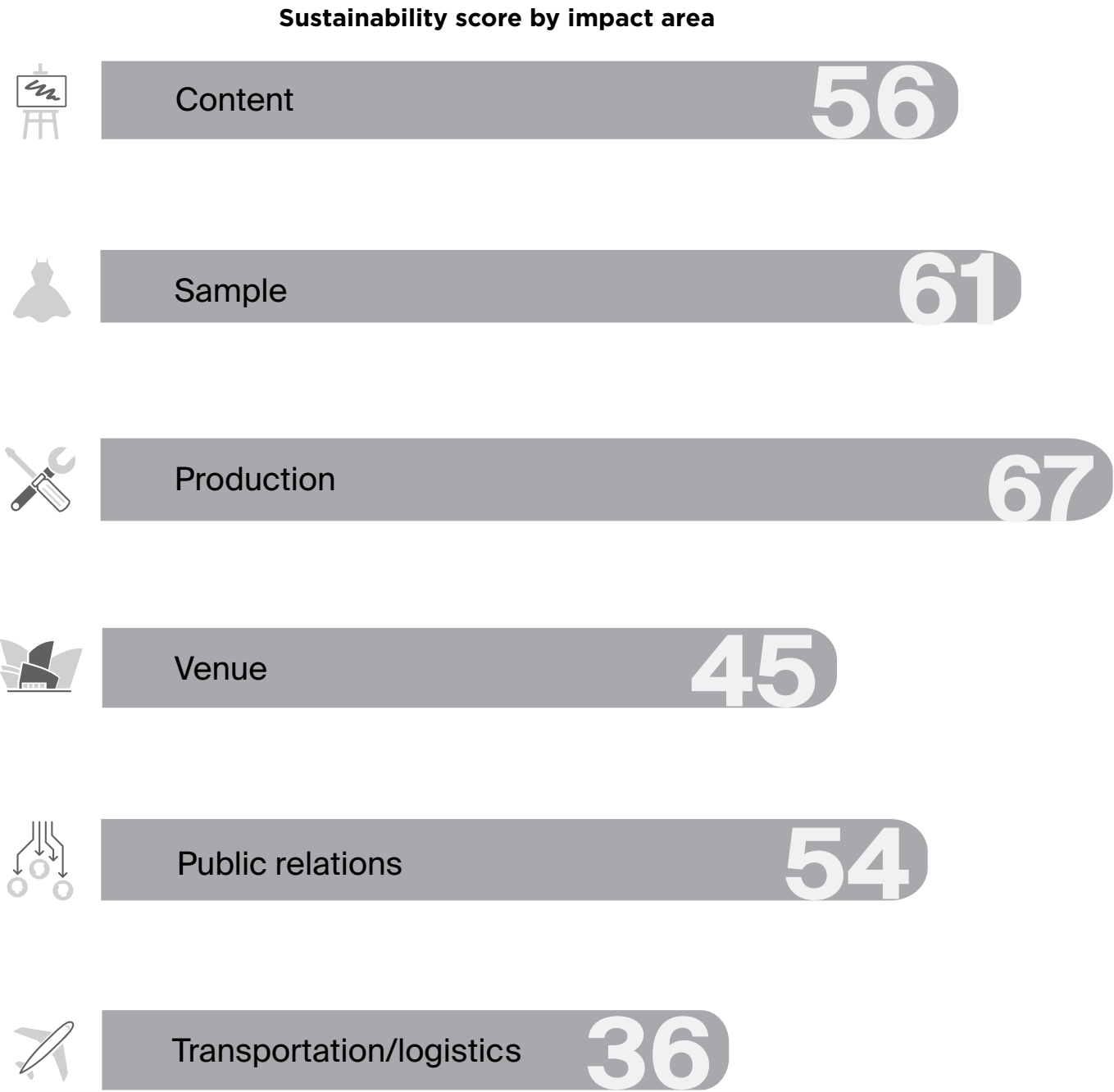






EXHIBIT 7 | THE CFDA CAN TAKE STRATEGIC ACTION TO BOOST NYFW'S SUSTAINABILITY








CFDA action	Immediate (~ 1 year)	Near term (2-3 years)	Long term (3+ years)
 Educate and offer resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Educate NYFW stakeholders on sustainability (Impact Report and Playbook) Establish an award for designers incorporating sustainability into their shows/designs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide directories (specific to producers, production, PR needs) for sustainable materials in samples and sets, venues, catering/restaurant options, and hotels Establish an official CFDA digital platform for livestreaming shows 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop a deadstock database for brands to leverage when putting together samples Offer a centralized storage facility for brands to house set materials for reuse from prior shows
 Coordinate across brands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Encourage brands to share resources during NYFW, including venues, equipment, and crews Pilot measurement for carbon emissions with a selected representative group of brands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinate show locations across brands to minimize guests' travel 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organize transportation for post-show materials (to be recycled, composted, etc.)
 Establish guidelines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ban single-use plastic items From NYFW Develop a “quick wins” toolkit for producers for sustainable events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Endorse existing sustainability guidelines (e.g., Sustainable Apparel Coalition) to promote sustainability during NYFW 	
 Develop and facilitate partnerships		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Recommend and facilitate introductions to partners for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carbon measurement and offsetting Digital livestreaming Energy-efficient resources Reuse of materials for samples and sets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Involve local government in championing sustainability during NYFW (monetary support, outreach support) Partner with local government on waste disposal, and on recycling or reusing materials

Source: BCG analysis.





● Require early action to start developing

THE NYFW SUSTAINABILITY PLAYBOOK

Content

Action	Ease to achieve
 Offer digital look books (for buyers/partners) in lieu of physical look books	■
 Generate content/assets from NYFW to use for other brand marketing purposes	■
 Opt for a reduced audience with digital presentation/livestream of the runway show	■
 Livestream the runway show (for clienteling/other marketing purposes)	■
 Partner with local artists and photographers to reduce travel	■
 Partner with other organizations to generate content for awareness of sustainability	■
 Consider alternative formats for shows and events (e.g., private showings, film/video)	■













Sustainability dimension

 Waste	 Materials
 Energy	 Partnerships

Ease to achieve



























■ Easy	■ Moderate	■ Hard
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Samples

Action	Ease to achieve
 Use reusable/recyclable packaging items (garment bags vs. single use)	■
 Minimize waste generation (samples, packaging)	■
 Partner with manufacturers with ethical labor practices	■
 Use or partner with manufacturers who use sustainably sourced materials	■
 Minimize the number of rush orders/changes	■
 Don't use fur or exotic skins in samples	■
 Choose ground/sea travel to (vs. air) for shipping	■
 Use and push forward recycled/upcycled materials	■
 Reuse, repurpose, recycle, upcycle, and donate as much as possible after the show	■
 Use renewable energy sources for production	■
 Leverage digital recourses in lieu of physical, whenever applicable	■
 Produce samples locally (CFDA/FMI NY)	■











Production



Action	Ease to achieve
 Rent materials (vs. buy)	
 Use hair and makeup products with minimal or recyclable packaging	
 Partner with collectors of show waste	
 Use organic/natural makeup and hair products	
 Serve organic/locally sourced food and beverages	
 Partner with restaurants/caterers that offer organic/locally sourced food/goods	
 Partner with suppliers who source set materials sustainably	
 Partner with local vendors/artisans	
 Reuse materials from prior shows	
 Reuse/repurpose/recycle/upcycle/donate materials after the show/events	
 Use recycled/upcycled/recyclable/compostable materials (vs. plastic)	
 Use low-carbon/renewable energy sources	
 Minimize/offset the carbon emissions generated from transportation related to production	

Venue



Action	Ease to achieve
 Eliminate single-use plastic bottles (offer water filling stations or sustainably packaged water)	
 Encourage recycling onsite by placing recycle bins both onsite and backstage	
 Choose a venue location that complies with “green” energy standards	
 Repurpose the venue post-show for other events (e.g., reception, parties)	
 Partner with other brands to minimize distance between shows, or share venue with other brands	

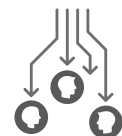
Sustainability dimension











 Waste	 Materials
 Energy	 Partnerships

Ease to achieve

 Easy	 Moderate	 Hard
--	--	--











Public relations







Action	Ease to achieve
 Eliminate paper invitations and show notes; opt for digital distribution instead	
 Use recycled materials in physical invitations	
 Minimize waste in relation to gifts to guests; eliminate gift bags or give recyclable gifts	
 Partner with organizations to put on events promoting awareness of sustainability	
 Do not accept sponsorships from brands that do not have sustainable practices	

Transportation/logistics



Action	Ease to achieve
 Partner with hotels with sustainable practices	
 Consolidate guest, team, and model travel as much as possible	
 Offset the carbon emissions generated from air travel of guests, teams, and models	
 Offset the carbon emissions generated from ground travel of guests, teams, and models	
 Partner with car fleets powered by electricity to transport guests	

Sustainability dimension

 Waste	 Materials
 Energy	 Partnerships

Ease to achieve

 Easy	 Moderate	 Hard
---	--	--