

Tracking the Future: Building a Scope 3 Climate Policy Tool for HBS and OFS

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The Challenge of Scope 3 Emissions

When we think about a university's carbon footprint, it is easy to picture the direct emissions from campus buildings or the electricity purchased to keep the lights on. However, at Harvard Business School (HBS), the vast majority of our environmental impact lies elsewhere. Scope 3 emissions—the indirect emissions that occur up and down our value chain—are actually larger than Scope 1 and Scope 2 combined. These emissions encompass everything from the food served in our dining halls and the embodied carbon in new construction projects, to the laptops we utilize and the flights students take for global treks.

While Harvard's Office for Sustainability (OFS) is deeply committed to reducing these Scope 3 emissions, tracking them presents a monumental challenge for reliable data collection. Scope 3 is inherently diffuse, external, and difficult to monitor across thousands of vendors and activities. At the same time, the global regulatory landscape is shifting rapidly. New climate policies and disclosure requirements are multiplying across jurisdictions, impacting a variety of potential vendors and making it increasingly complex to stay ahead of what Scope 3 data may become available that could inform analysis and future sustainability targets for Harvard.

What We Set Out to Do

As Student Sustainability Associates working for HBS Operations, we partnered with Harvard's Office for Sustainability to address this critical gap. Our goal was to build a dynamic, lightweight, and structured tool that OFS could use to monitor relevant climate policies, understand opportunities for HBS to leverage this information with vendors, and update the tracker over time with minimal effort.

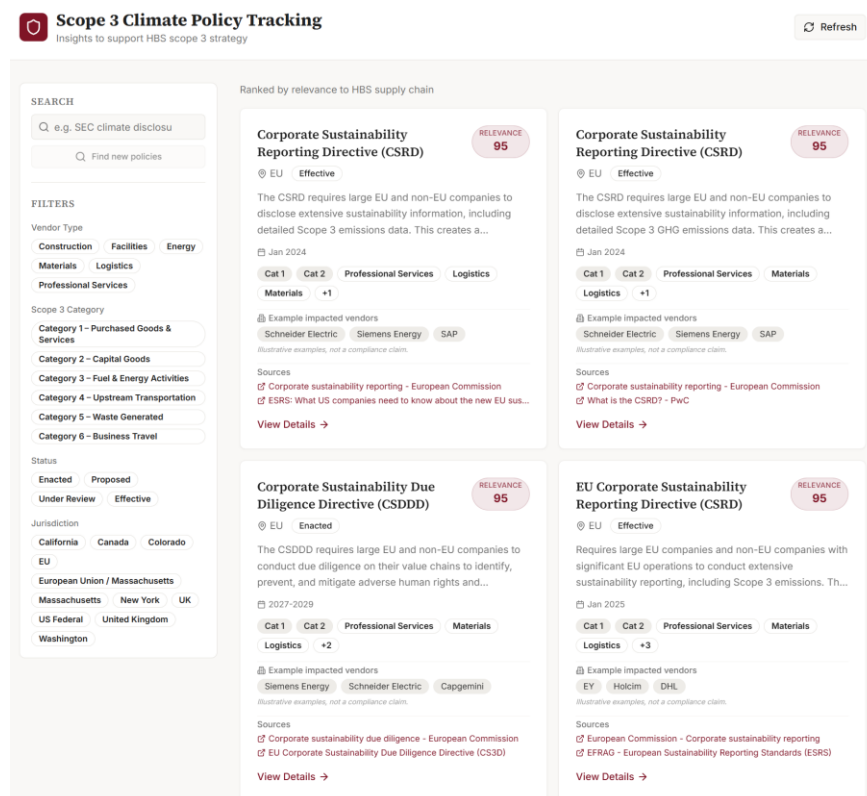
We recognized that an effective policy tracking tool needed to be more than just a list of regulations. It needed to be relevant, dynamic, and actionable. We wanted to create a system that not only tracked policy developments but also translated them into usable insights—answering the crucial "so what?" for HBS. Furthermore, the tool needed to connect these policies directly to HBS vendor types and specific Scope 3 categories, clearly outlining risks and opportunities to enable informed decision-making.

Building the Climate Policy Tracking Tool

Over the course of the project, we worked through three sequenced phases to bring this tool to life. First, we deep-dived into the policies impacting Harvard's Scope 3 emissions, reviewing existing resources and building a comprehensive reference library. Next, we mapped key concerns and priority areas, translating complex policy developments into operational implications and identifying high-priority regulatory trends where we recommend near-term attention. Finally, we developed the methodology and tooling for ongoing, automated updates, delivering the final Climate Policy Tracking Tool.

Through iterative feedback with the OFS and HBS team, we continuously refined the tool to increase its usability and the quality of its insights. We learned several key lessons along the way:

- **Link to Impact:** It is essential to clearly link policy information to its direct impact for our stakeholders, specifically referencing the types of vendors affected and providing concrete examples.
- **Highlight Opportunities:** We needed to highlight the opportunities enabled by policy changes, such as the chance for Harvard to better collect vendor data and establish itself as a leader in sustainable procurement.
- **Prioritize Information:** Important information, including the timing of policy impacts and prioritized Scope 3 categories, must be brought upfront for quick visibility.
- **Enable Advanced Filtering:** We incorporated advanced filtering and search capabilities to allow users to drill down into detailed policy insights based on jurisdiction, status, and vendor type.



A snapshot of the Scope 3 Climate Policy Tracking Tool, showcasing its filtering capabilities and detailed policy insights.

Looking Ahead

The Climate Policy Tracking Tool we developed provides HBS Operations and the Harvard Office for Sustainability with improved visibility into Scope 3 emissions across vendor categories. It enables a proactive response to regulatory changes and reporting requirements, helping us to have the most accurate, impactful, and timely Scope 3 data.

As we look to the future, there are exciting opportunities for subsequent SSA projects to build upon this foundation. Next steps could include refining the tool further with OFS, integrating

it with existing procurement systems and workflows, and expanding its coverage to monitor additional jurisdictions and regulations.

We are incredibly proud to have contributed to a project that sits at the intersection of policy, operations, and sustainability. By organizing our understanding of Scope 3 emissions and proactively tracking the regulatory landscape, we hope this tool will empower HBS and OFS to make more informed, sustainable decisions for years to come. We extend our sincere gratitude to the Office for Sustainability and HBS Operations for their partnership and guidance throughout this project.