

# Manual for the sustainability assessment of start-ups

A practical tool for start-up teams, investors and funding organizations



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# 1 Introduction

The manual for the sustainability assessment of start-ups was developed as part of the “GreenUp-Invest” project by the Borderstep Institute for Innovation and Sustainability and Forum Nachhaltige Geldanlagen (FNG). The project is supported by the German Federal Ministry for the Environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (BMUB) within the context of the German National Climate Initiative (NCI).

## Requirements

Particular consideration was given to two requirements during the development of the manual. Firstly, the manual aims to provide entrepreneurs, investors, and other users with assured direction regarding the sustainability potential of a start-up. Clear criteria and a transparent assessment process should provide an objective and transparent assessment. The assessment is intended to provide an overall result as well as differentiated individual results for various aspects of sustainability. Secondly, the manual should be practical and flexible to use. This includes context-based adaptability of the assessment scheme (e.g. for different sectors and objectives), diversity, and differentiation with respect to its use as well as a positive cost-benefit ratio for all parties concerned.

## Target groups

The manual targets different user groups.

### Start-ups

For start-up teams and its venture, the manual provides the opportunity to intensively analyze the sustainability and social impact of its business model, to carry out a self-assessment, and to professionally communicate its own impact based on this.

### Investors

The manual is intended to support investors in identifying sustainable start-ups as potential investments and competently assessing these in regard to their sustainability and impact. Moreover, the manual is intended to drive sustainability-oriented business model development in dialog with investors and start-ups.

### Rating agencies

For rating agencies, the manual provides assured direction with respect to the sustainability assessment of a start-up as well as an additional tool for existing assessment processes.

### Funding and support organizations

Furthermore, the manual provides a good basis for funding and support organizations when it comes to selecting sustainable start-ups for support programs, for incubator and accelerator programs or establishing an objective basis for dialog regarding subsequent training and mentoring formats.

## Assessment concept

The manual follows a clear structure, taking the following four areas of the start-up into consideration regarding sustainability and impact:

- 1 Business context (industry, field of technology etc.)
- 2 Start-up team
- 3 Business concept
- 4 Products and services

For each of the four sections, a separate assessment is conducted using different criteria and questions. In the third chapter of the manual, there is the option of calculating a sustainability score, which allows different start-ups to be compared or ranked. The sustainability score further allows a start-up to record and compare developments regarding its sustainability over a longer period of time.

## Instructions for using the manual

The manual can be used regardless of the start-up's stage of development (seed, start-up, growth, later, steady). The open assessment scheme makes it possible to take each start-up's individual level of maturity into account. Depending on future user feedback, in-depth and, if necessary, separate elaborations regarding different start-up's stages of development are possible for subsequent versions of the guide.

The required time for completion of the manual depends on how detailed the information provided is, along with existing preparatory work and the start-up's stage of development.

The manual includes information boxes that help to complete the manual and provide definitions and clarifications of key terms. The information boxes are not essential for carrying out the assessment.

Each user can decide which parts of the manual are to be taken into consideration in the assessment. However, in order to gain a sound overall picture of the start-up, it is recommended that all four criteria sections of the manual are completed.

At the end of the assessment, an overall score can be calculated in the form of a sustainability score based on the individual assessments. The score is merely an internal assessment by the user and does not meet the standards of public comparability. Depending on the user, the assessment can lead to different results.

### → Sustainability

With respect to the term “sustainability”, this manual refers to the definition by the United Nations. In 1987, The Brundlandt Commission defined sustainability as “development that meets the needs of current generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs and choose their own lifestyle”. Thus, economic, ecological, and social objectives are addressed. The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), determined by the United Nations as a list of objectives for sustainable development up until 2030, are recognized and applied worldwide in this context. In the finance world, the term ‘ESG’ is also often used, which emphasizes the aspects of Environment, Social, and Governance.

### → Start-ups

When speaking of “start-ups”, the manual refers to start-up projects and young companies which, according to the definition by the German Startups Association, exhibit the following characteristics:

- They are less than ten years old.
- They are (highly) innovative regarding their technology and/or business model.
- They have achieved or are striving for significant employee and/or business growth.

### → Development stages of a start-up

The development stages of a start-up are defined based on the definition by the German Startups Association:

**Seed-Stage:** The start-up is in the process of developing its founding concept. No users have been reached and no revenues have been generated yet.

**Start-up-Stage:** The start-up has a market-ready offering. First users and revenues can be reported.

**Growth-Stage:** The start-up shows strong user and/or revenue growth.

**Later-Stage:** The start-up is an established market player. The trade sale or stock market flotation has already taken place or is about to commence.

**Steady-Stage:** The start-up has stagnated and is not showing any strong user and/or revenue growth (anymore).

## 2 Using the manual

It is recommended that the assessment is carried out according to the following structure:

<b>Criterion 1: Business context</b>	
1.1 Exclusion criteria	1.2 Risk criteria
	1.3 Positive criteria
<b>Criterion 2: Start-up team</b>	
2.1 Sustainability orientation	2.2 Sustainability experience
<b>Criterion 3: Business concept</b>	
3.1 Sustainability concept	3.2 Stakeholder management and transparency
<b>Criterion 4: Product and services</b>	
4.1 Contribution to sustainability challenges	4.2 Impact management

The criteria sections can be completed from the perspective of the start-up or that of third parties such as investors or funding organizations. Some of the questions are specifically formulated so start-ups can assess themselves, while others are addressed at investors and third parties. However, most of the questions are identical for both groups.

Image 1: Structure of the assessment concept

## General information about the assessed start-up and the person carrying out the assessment

### General information about the assessed start-up

Name of the start-up

Year founded

Industry sector

Product/services

Development stage  
(seed, start-up, growth,  
later or steady)

Contact details  
(address, telephone  
number, e-mail)

Website

### General information about the person carrying out the assessment

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Function \_\_\_\_\_

Organization \_\_\_\_\_

### General information about the assessment

**Time frame or date of the assessment:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Application case of the assessment** (Please select):

**Self-assessment by the start-up without a subsequent audit:** The start-up responds to the questions and carries out the assessment on its own. A quality and plausibility check by a third party (e.g. a sustainability expert or an investor) does not take place.

**Responses provided by the start-up and then assessed or audited by a third party:** The start-up responds to the questions. The assessment along with a quality and plausibility check are then carried out by a third party (e.g. sustainability expert or an investor).

**Responses provided and assessed by an investor or funding organization:** Investors or funding organizations use the manual as an additional information and assessment tool. Based on the available information (business plan, pitch, investor meetings etc.), they can evaluate the different criteria in relation to a specific start-up.

### Further information and comments:

\_\_\_\_\_

# Assessment of the criteria

## Criterion 1: Business context

In the following section, the business context of the start-up is evaluated on the basis of possible filter criteria. Users of the guide must decide for themselves whether these are to be used by the start-up or by external third parties (investors, etc.). Possible exclusion, risk and positive criteria are presented in the following.

### Criterion 1.1: Possible exclusion criteria

#### Questions

Is the start-up active in one of the following exclusion areas?

- 1 Production of controversial weapons (such as cluster bombs, anti-personnel mines, or ABC weapons)
- 2 Production of conventional weapons or military armament
- 3 The operation of nuclear power plants and the production of components for nuclear power plants

yes no

Does the start-up violate one or more of the core principles of the UN Global Compact?

- 1 Human rights: Severe and/or systematic breaches of human rights. Human rights are defined in the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.
- 2 Labor law: Severe and/or systematic breaches of the ILO (International Labour Organization) core labor standards and its four core principles: Freedom of association and the effective recognition of the right to collective bargaining, the elimination of forced or compulsory labor, the abolition of child labor, and the elimination of discrimination in respect of employment and occupation.
- 3 Environmental protection: Severe and/or systematic breaches of environmental legislation and/or massive environmental destruction.

- 4 Corruption and bribery: Severe and/or systematic corruption and/or bribery.

yes no

Source: Exclusion criteria according to the FNG Seal

Are there any further criteria or characteristics the start-up or the investor would like to exclude for the business activity, e.g. a specific industry affiliation?

yes no

#### → Examples of industry sectors with exclusion potential

Weapons, alcohol & tobacco, fossil fuels, pharmaceuticals, genetic engineering, livestock farming, etc.

#### Assessment

The questions are assessed on the basis of the YES/NO principle. If one of the assessment criteria is answered with a "Yes", the sustainability of the start-up can essentially be doubted or denied. Without a substantial change to the start-up's technology, product, sectoral positioning, or business concept, the start-up should not be classified as sustainable.

#### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:



Criterion 1.2: Risk criteria

Questions

Is the start-up active in a business area that is controversial at societal level and presents economic risks for its own strategy?  
*(e.g. by damaging its image or due to future legal regulations that influence the business activity)*

Is the start-up active in a business area that is controversial at societal level and presents economic risks for the strategy of third parties *(future investors, partners etc.)*, for example in terms of the investment strategy, portfolio strategy, or business strategy?

Assessment

The business area of the start-up ...

0	1	2	3	4
presents <b>high risks</b> for its own strategy or the strategy of third parties	presents <b>increased risks</b> for its own strategy or the strategy of third parties	presents <b>moderate risks</b> for its own strategy or the strategy of third parties	presents <b>low risks</b> for its own strategy or the strategy of third parties	presents <b>no risks</b> for its own strategy or the strategy of third parties

Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

→ **Controversial business areas**

According to *oekom research*, the following business areas can be classified as controversial:

Abortion, alcohol, nuclear energy, chlorinated hydrocarbon, embryo research, violent video games, gambling, green genetic engineering, furs, pesticides, pornography, military armament, tobacco, animal testing.

### Criterion 1.3: Positive criteria

There are two options for answering the questions. The questions under Option A specifically address start-ups and are formulated for a start-up's self-assessment. The questions under Option B are formulated for external parties such as investors.

#### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

#### Option A: Questions for start-ups

Does our start-up's product, service, technology, or field of activity fit the strategy of specific capital providers or cooperation partners (*in terms of investment strategy, portfolio strategy, business strategy*)?

Does our start-up's product, service, technology, or field of activity fit the sustainability goals of specific capital providers or cooperation partners (*in terms of investment strategy, portfolio strategy, business strategy*)?

#### Assessment

Our start-up ...

0

**does not fit** the strategy and/or the sustainability goals at all.

1

**barely fits** the strategy and/or the sustainability goals.

2

**partially fits** the strategy and/or the sustainability goals.

3

**fits** the strategy and/or the sustainability goals **well**.

4

**fits** the strategy and/or the sustainability goals **very well**.

#### Option B: Questions for external parties (investors etc.)

Does the start-up's product, service, technology, or field of activity fit our strategy (*in terms of investment strategy, portfolio strategy, business strategy*)?

Does the start-up's product, service, technology, or field of activity fit our sustainability goals?

#### Assessment

The start-up ...

0

**does not fit** our strategy and/or the sustainability goals at all.

1

**barely fits** our strategy and/or the sustainability goals.

2

**partially fits** our strategy and/or the sustainability goals.

3

**fits** our strategy and/or the sustainability goals **well**.

4

**fits** our strategy and/or the sustainability goals **very well**.

## Criterion 2: Start-up team

The assessment of the start-up team is intended to provide information on the start-up team's orientation toward sustainability and its sustainability experience. The two factors have a significant influence on the long-term integration of sustainability aspects into the business model and corporate development.

### Criterion 2.1: Level of orientation toward sustainability in the start-up team

#### Questions

What is the start-up team's position on environmental and social responsibility of companies? For example, is the start-up team of the opinion that environmental protection and resource conservation are, in principle, high priorities in the business activities of companies?

To what extent does the start-up team see the integration of ecological and social sustainability as an opportunity to identify additional opportunities and risks for their own entrepreneurial activity?

To what extent is the motivation behind the start-up characterized by environmental or social objectives (*environmental protection, fair working conditions, solving social problems, etc.*)?

#### Assessment

The start-up team's level of orientation toward sustainability is high.

0

**Does not** apply at all

1

**Barely** applies at all

2

Applies **in part**

3

**Broadly** applies

4

**Fully** applies

### Criterion 2.2: Level of sustainability experience in the start-up team

#### Questions

To what extent does the start-up team already have prior experience and expertise regarding sustainability, *e.g. from previous careers*?

To what extent does the start-up team already have prior experience of founding a sustainability-oriented company?

#### Assessment

The start-up team's level of sustainability experience and expertise is high.

0

**Does not** apply at all

1

**Barely** applies at all

2

Applies **in part**

3

**Broadly** applies

4

**Fully** applies

#### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

### Criterion 3: Business Concept

In the following section, the assessment of the business concept with respect to the sustainability requirements within the business activity is demonstrated.

#### Criterion 3.1: Scale, system, and substantiation of the entrepreneurial sustainability concept

The entrepreneurial sustainability concept comprises two parts. Part I involves questions with respect to the sustainability goals within the business operations. Part II involves questions about planned sustainability management.

##### Part I: Questions about sustainability goals

Has the topic of sustainability been considered in the business model right from the start (*Business Model Canvas, business plan etc.*)?

Which qualitative and/or quantitative sustainability goals are pursued in the context of the business activity or the value chain (*e.g. in the areas of production, suppliers, employees, communication, and marketing*)?

#### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

#### Part I: Assessment

Has a convincing statement been provided regarding the above-mentioned questions? How comprehensive, systematic, and substantial are the responses in relation to the development stage of the start-up?

Entrepreneurial sustainability goals ...

0

are **not** presented and identifiable

1

are **barely** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

2

are only **partially** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

3

are **broadly** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

4

are **comprehensively**, systematically, and substantially identifiable

### → Sustainable Business Canvas: A tool for sustainability-oriented business model development

The Business Model Canvas was originally developed by Alexander Osterwalder and Yves Pigneur and serves as a tool for the visualization and analysis of business models. Currently, it is the most used instrument in start-up management. As part of the Start-up4Climate Initiative, the tool was further developed by the Borderstep Institute and the University of Oldenburg with regard to sustainability aspects. The Canvas can be used interactively for the development of sustainable business models.

Tiemann, I. & Fichter, K. (2016). Developing business models with the Sustainable Business Canvas: Manual for conducting workshops. Oldenburg, Berlin: Universität Oldenburg.

The image shows a digital template for a Sustainable Business Canvas. At the top, there is a green header with the text 'Sustainable Business Canvas' and the logo of the 'Borderstep Institute for Innovation and Sustainability'. Below the header, there are fields for 'Name:' and 'Date:'. The main body of the canvas is a grid of boxes, each with a title and an icon: 'Vision & Mission' (globe icon), 'Key Partnerships' (handshake icon), 'Key Activities' (laptop icon), 'Key Resources' (toolbox icon), 'Value Proposition' (document icon), 'Customers' (handshake icon), 'Competition' (document icon), 'Other Stakeholders' (group of people icon), 'Cost Structure' (line graph icon), and 'Revenue Streams' (line graph icon). At the bottom left, there is a small copyright notice: '© 2017 Borderstep Institute'. At the bottom right, there is a larger copyright notice: 'Fichter, I. und Tiemann, I. (2016), Universität Oldenburg, Eigenes Urheberrecht, nach Osterwalder, A. und Pigneur, Y. (2011)'.

### Part II: Questions regarding sustainability management

Is a process in place or planned that ensures compliance with the sustainability goals (*e.g. by means of regular KPI reporting*)? If so, where is this documented?

Have there been any developments with respect to sustainability since the foundation of the start-up?

### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

A large, empty rectangular box with a thin green border, intended for the user to provide their own comments or reasons for the assessment.

### Part II: Assessment

Has a convincing statement been provided regarding the above-mentioned questions? How comprehensive, systematic, and substantial are the responses in relation to the development stage of the start-up?

Entrepreneurial sustainability management ...

0

is **not** presented and identifiable

1

is **barely** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

2

is only **partially** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

3

is **broadly** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

4

is **comprehensively**, systematically, and substantially identifiable

### Criterion 3.2: Scope, system, and substantiation of stakeholder management and public transparency

#### Questions

Are external stakeholder groups integrated in the sustainability process? If so, which ones and how?

Does external transparency exist in terms of the business activity? Are there activities that ensure public transparency? If so, what activities and where are these documented?

Are existing social and/or ecological product or industry standards used? Are there activities for increasing social and/or ecological industry standards? If so, what activities?

#### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

#### → External stakeholder groups according to the Sustainable Business Canvas

External stakeholder groups can affect business success or are affected by the business activities or the result of business activity. They are relevant if they have a significant positive or negative influence on the success of the business, e.g. non-profit organizations, family and relatives of employees, financial stakeholder groups, scientific institutes, audit and certification organizations, governmental organizations, municipalities etc.)

#### Assessment

Has a convincing statement been provided regarding the above-mentioned questions? How comprehensive, systematic, and substantial are the responses in relation to the development stage of the start-up?

Activities in the area of stakeholder management and transparency ...

0

are **not** presented and identifiable

1

are **barely** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

2

are only **partially** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

3

are **broadly** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

4

are **comprehensively**, systematically, and substantially identifiable

**Criterion 4:  
Products and services**

In the following section, the products, services, and underlying technologies are assessed in terms of their contribution to solving sustainability challenges as well as their social and ecological impacts.

**Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:**

**Criterion 4.1: Level of contribution by the technology, product, or service to solving sustainability challenges**

**Questions**

Which sustainability challenges (e.g. climate change) or Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) does the product/service contribute to?

How and to what extent does this take place? (If possible, quantify the contribution to sustainability, energy savings in kWh, reduction of greenhouse gases in CO<sub>2</sub> equivalents etc., or give concrete and comprehensible examples)

**Assessment**

The contribution to solving/meeting sustainability challenges is high.

- 0
- Does not apply (e.g. no contribution to sustainability challenges)
- 1
- Barely applies.
- 2
- Partially applies.
- 3
- Broadly applies.
- 4
- Fully applies.

➔ **Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)**

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) comprise 17 goals for sustainable development. The goals were determined by the United Nations as a list of objectives for sustainable development up until 2030.

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdgs>



Figure 2: The 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

➔ **Assessment of the impact of a technology on the environment and society**

The potential positive and negative impacts of a technology on both the environment and society are often difficult to comprehensively assess. Assistance is provided in this regard, for example, by reports and analyses from the Office of Technology Assessment at the German Bundestag (TAB) or by reports and discussions about Responsible Research and Innovation (RRI).

<http://www.tab-beim-bundestag.de/en/index.html>  
<https://www.rri-tools.eu/about-rri>

## Criterion 4.2: Scope, system, and substantiation of impact management

### Questions

What specifically is to be achieved with regard to the target group, society, and the environment?  
(Please name the target groups explicitly.)

Which activities and measures are therefore planned or being implemented and what are their goals?

Which effects do the measures have? Who is to be reached and what specifically is to be changed?

Which survey methodology and indicators are applied to document and measure the impact?

Is a continual process for the communication of, reflection on, and improvement of impact management planned?

(Source: PHINEO impact approach)

### Assessment

Has a convincing statement been provided regarding the above-mentioned questions? How comprehensive, systematic, and substantial are the responses in relation to the development stage of the start-up?

Impact management ...

0

is **not** presented and identifiable

1

is **barely** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

2

is only **partially** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

3

is **broadly** comprehensively, systematically, and substantially identifiable

4

is **comprehensively**, systematically, and substantially identifiable

### Own comments, if necessary stating reasons for the assessment:

#### → Impact Reporting and Investment Standards (IRIS)

IRIS provides a set of indicators to measure social and environmental performance.

<http://iris.thegiin.org>

#### → Social Impact Navigator by PHINEO

The Social Impact Navigator serves as a practical guidebook, which is clear and easy to understand. It helps the user to integrate impact orientation into the usually hectic everyday life of a project step-by-step.

<https://www.phineo.org/english>



## 3 Overall assessment

The overall assessment can be made in the form of a sustainability score, based on previous individual assessments. The calculated score is merely an internal assessment by the user and does not meet the standards of public comparability. Depending on the user, the assessment can lead to different results.

### **Proceed with the overall assessment as follows:**

Transfer the scores of the previous individual assessments to the overall assessment (maximum of four points per criterion).

Determine a weighting factor for the individual criteria or use the suggested weighting factor (in parentheses).  
*Note: A weighting factor for the individual criteria is not mandatory. However, it helps to determine individual key aspects in the sustainability assessment. Whether or not a weighting factor is applied and what it should be is decided by the user.*

Multiply the scores from the individual assessment by the weighting factor and insert the result into the box as a weighted score.

Add the weighted scores to get a total score (maximum of 100 points).

Assessment criteria	Result after individual assessment		
<b>1 Business context</b>	If one of the exclusion criteria is answered with a “Yes”, the sustainability of the start-up can essentially be doubted or denied. Without a substantial change to the start-up’s technology, product, sectoral positioning, or business concept, the start-up should not be classified as sustainable.		
1.1 Exclusion criteria			
The Start-up			
• is active in an exclusion area	yes	no	
• violates the UN Global Compact	yes	no	
• violates additional defined criteria	yes	no	
	<b>Score from individual assessments</b> <i>(0-4 points per individual assessment)</i>	<b>Individual weighting factor</b> <i>(Suggestion in parentheses)</i>	<b>Weighted score</b> <i>(Points from individual assessment x weighting factor)</i>
1.2 Risk criteria	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
1.3 Positive criteria	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
<b>2 Start-up team</b>			
2.1 Start-up team’s level of orientation toward sustainability	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
2.2 Start-up team’s level of sustainability experience or expertise	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
<b>3 Business concept</b>			
3.1 Scope, system, and substantiation of the entrepreneurial sustainability concept			
Part I: Questions regarding sustainability goals	Points	x (Factor 2)	= Points
Part II: Questions regarding sustainability management	Points	x (Factor 2)	= Points
3.2 Scope, system, and substantiation of stakeholder management and transparency	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
<b>4 Products and services</b>			
4.1 Level of contribution by the product or service to solving sustainability challenges	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
4.2 Scope, system, and substantiation of impact management	Points	x (Factor 3)	= Points
<b>Assessment results “Sustainability score”</b>	<b>Total score (max. 100 points)</b>		<b>Points</b>

## 4 Rating and use of the assessment results

### What significance do the assessment results hold?

The assessment results provide information about the current sustainability performance of the start-up. This manual is typically used for an initial assessment of a start-up. During the assessment, the focus is on the qualitative identification of strengths and, if applicable, weaknesses and the need for improvements. The overall assessment in the form of a score is intended to make the qualitative profile of strengths and weaknesses easier to understand. However, quantification should not be the main focus or even considered in isolation. It is useful in the case of a possible second or subsequent assessment to identify changes and progress more quickly and more easily.

### Are the assessment results comparable?

First of all, this manual is only used to assess a single start-up. The assessment results in a profile of strengths and weaknesses that is as objective and individual as possible. The profile illustrates the current sustainability performance and, in doing so, supports continuous improvement of short and long-term sustainability performance.

In principle, two comparison dimensions are conceivable: **1.** Comparisons of the sustainability performance of a start-up at various stages of development; or **2.** Comparisons of different start-ups at a similar development stage. It is important to note that the quality and

significance of the results depend on how thoroughly and objectively the assessment is carried out. Who performs the assessment is also crucial:

#### The start-up team itself:

If a start-up team has evaluated their own start-up without a third party performing a “counter-check”, the results will be highly subjective and not readily comparable to the self-assessments of other teams.

#### Experienced investor or rating team:

If, on the other hand, one or several start-ups are assessed in a consistent manner by an experienced investor or rating team, it can be assumed that the result is relatively objective. An assessment carried out in a consistent manner involves using identically interpreted criteria and ensuring that the assessment carried out by several persons is both reliable and consistent (scientific “inter-rater reliability”). Under these conditions, comparisons of the start-ups assessed are possible.

Therefore, if the criteria are always interpreted and assessed in the same way and “counter-checks” are carried out by third parties or by several raters, the degree of comparability increases. However, such comparisons also only serve the user-internal comparison of a start-up or a start-up portfolio. This manual is not intended to be used for public comparisons or rankings.

### How can the assessment results be used purposefully?

Purposeful use of the assessment results includes various aspects.

If, in the context of the exclusion criteria, fundamental violations of the principles of sustainability have been identified, the business should be reviewed with regard to compliance with the minimum requirements of corporate sustainability and future social requirements.

If the result in one of the four assessment areas is significantly better or worse than in the others, this indicates the individual strengths and weaknesses of the start-up. Potential starting points for continuous improvement of the sustainability performance and impact management of the start-up are thus highlighted.

If the assessment tool is used on a regular basis (for example, annually), this can form the basis for a recurring dialogue. This supports the start-up in its future development and reflects the entrepreneurial action and its impact. Thus, regular use of the assessment tool lays the foundation for continuously checking corporate sustainability.

We would like to thank everyone who has used the assessment tool and invite them to share their experiences regarding the applicability and usefulness of the manual with us. We are also happy to take questions, criticism and improvement notes regarding the manual.

Please send these to:

[leitfaden@borderstep.de](mailto:leitfaden@borderstep.de) or [leitfaden@forum-ng.org](mailto:leitfaden@forum-ng.org).

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## Consortium



Borderstep Institute for  
Innovation and Sustainability



Bundesverband  
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Startups e.V.



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[www.greenupinvest.de](http://www.greenupinvest.de)