HIGGG INDEX
COMMUNICATIONS
MANUAL

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATORS
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Using this guide

The Higg Index Communications Manual supports Sustainable Apparel Coalition (SAC) members and Higg Index customers in communicating about their commitment to the Higg Index. This guide is designed for communications, marketing, and public relations professionals working for SAC member organizations and Higg Index customers in the apparel, footwear, and textile industry.

By communicating about the Higg Index, you can share your organization’s commitment to social and environmental sustainability. Using the Higg Index conveys that your organization promotes an apparel, footwear, and textile industry that supports the well-being of the planet and its communities.

By promoting your organization’s involvement with the SAC and the Higg Index, you help to make the SAC’s vision of a more transparent industry a reality.

This manual provides guidance on:

- **How** to share your company’s commitment to sustainability through its use of the Higg Index
- **What** kinds of information can be shared publicly, through various communications and marketing channels
- **With whom** you can share this information
- **Why** some information cannot be shared

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1 The Sustainable Apparel Coalition’s vision is of an apparel, footwear, and textiles industry that produces no unnecessary environmental harm and has a positive impact on the people and communities associated with its activities.

2 While Higg Index scores may not be published publicly yet, SAC member and Higg Index customers can share general information publicly about how the Higg Index contributes to organizations’ sustainability journeys.
What is the Higg Index

Developed by the SAC, the Higg Index is a suite of tools that enables brands, retailers, and facilities of all sizes—at every stage in their sustainability journey—to accurately measure a company or product’s sustainability performance. By assessing social and environmental sustainability impacts, the Higg Index drives performance improvement across the value chain to protect the planet and the communities where the industry operates.

The Higg Index is the first holistic approach that measures social and environmental performance in the apparel, footwear, and textile sector at industry scale. It measures performance across the value chain at facility, brand, retail, and product levels. 

Learn more.

Higg Index Product Tools access the environmental impacts of apparel, footwear, and textiles products. Three different Higg Product Tools are available: the Higg MSI Contributor, the Higg Materials Sustainability Index (Higg MSI), and the Higg Design & Development Module (Higg DDM). The Higg Product Module will be released in 2019.

Higg Index Facility Tools measure environmental and social sustainability performance in manufacturing facilities around the world. These tools include the Higg Facility Environmental Module (Higg FEM) and the Higg Facility Social & Labor Module (Higg FSLM).

The Higg Brand & Retail Tool enables global brands and retailers to assess the sustainability of product lifecycles, environmental performance and the social and environmental performance of its operations. It is called the Higg Brand & Retail Module (Higg BRM).
How does my company use the Higg Index?

On the Higg Index platform, organizations complete a self-assessment about their social and environmental performance. Manufacturers can complete the Higg Facility Environmental Module and the Higg Facility Social & Labor Module. Brands and retailers complete the Higg Brand & Retail Module. Organizations may also use the Higg Product Tools currently available at product.higg.org.

Higg Index scores are calculated for different social and environmental impact areas. Scores are determined based on industry benchmarks and best practices, allowing organizations to see their own performance over time, against their competitors and others in the marketplace.

The modules’ aspirational-level questions offer facilities, brands, and retailers guidance on hotspots for improvement and outline the industry’s current best practices. Today companies can only share Higg Index scores privately with suppliers, business partners, and brand customers. But there is a lot you can share before scores become publicly available.
Why should I talk about the Higg Index?

This Higg Index Communications Manual enables and encourages your company to communicate about your sustainability journey as we work towards enabling the publication of Higg Index scores. Using one common language to share sustainability efforts will allow public stakeholders such as the financial community (investors), NGOs, policy makers and the broader public – including consumers and citizens – to understand and compare sustainability performance and make considered decisions based on trustworthy information.

Around the world governments, NGOs (such as the Transparency Pledge), consumer platforms (like Fashion Revolution’s Transparency Index or Good On You), and consumers are demanding more transparency and accountability for the impacts of apparel, footwear, and textile manufacturing.

When Can I Publish My Higg Score?

The SAC is currently determining the criteria and determining the communication guidelines for sharing Higg Index scores publicly. Coalition members must wait to publish Higg Index scores until verified modules are posted and the communication toolkits are provided.

The SAC will develop communication toolkits for the Higg Index Product Tools, the Higg Index Facility Tools, and the Higg Brand & Retail Tool and aims to enable the first communications of verified scores in 2020. To support Higg customers and SAC members in transparent communications, the SAC will also launch a public Higg Transparency platform by 2020.
Part 02 Communicating about the Higg Index

Integrity in sustainability communications

How do I talk about the Higg Index?

SAC members and Higg Index customers are encouraged to promote their use of the Higg Index (just remember, you may not publish scores until the corresponding Higg Index toolkit is available).

**Sustainability communications should be:**

**Clear:** Use clear, understandable language; don’t hide questionable or negative results behind complex jargon.

**Complete:** Share the actual results (when available), not just the “good news.” Show your customers when you’ve made a mistake or have identified an area for improvement. This builds trust.

**Honest:** Be true to the data. Efforts to cover up poor performance or to mislead by omission of unfavorable information damages your company image and undermines broader sustainability efforts.

**Consistent:** Be true to your vision, your mission, and your values. When you release information about your work with the Higg Index, share it across all your channels—nothing to hide.

Under all circumstances, SAC members and Higg Index customers are to avoid greenwashing — the practice of making claims about environmental or sustainability performance that cannot be backed up by publicly available and independently verifiable data.

Today communications about the Higg Index can feature:

- Statements about your organization’s commitment to sustainability and how your organization has contributed to the SAC’s efforts
- Your use of the Higg Index tools to measure and report sustainability performance
- The status of verification and/or verification plans
- SAC members may promote their membership in the Coalition
- Higg Index customers may promote Higg Index completion certificates available through the Higg Index platform
Sharing your Higg Index journey: Do’s and Don’t’s

**Do**

- Describe your company’s use of the Higg Index as a concrete example of its commitment to sustainability.
- Explain how the Higg Index is a sign that the apparel, footwear, and textile industry is making rapid progress in improving social and environmental sustainability throughout the value chain.
- Share your Higg Index scores privately with current business partners on Higg.org.
- Describe the measures your company is taking to improve its performance, such as better water and energy efficiency.
- Explain how your company is using the various tools related to facilities, products, and brands and retailers.
- Share information from the SAC website in your communication efforts.
- Share scores from the Higg Materials Sustainability Index that have been confirmed by the SAC.

**Don’t**

- Make claims about your company’s sustainability performance based on its Higg Index scores.
- Criticize non-members or suggest that only SAC members are pursuing sustainable practices.
- Share a specific score from the Higg Index with consumers or media.
- Describe measures that are not yet undertaken by your company as part of its Higg Index improvement program.
- Share specific scores from the Higg Facility and Brand & Retail Modules.
- Make claims about SAC or the Higg Index that are inconsistent with either material provided on the SAC website or with these guidelines.
- Present sustainability performance information the Higg Index does not yet cover, such as animal welfare, biodiversity, and circular economy, as linked to the Higg Index.
- Share general Higg Index impact figures which have not been provided by SAC staff without consulting SAC staff.
Higg Index
Transparency Resources

Higg Index Communication Toolkits

In addition to this communication manual, by 2020 the SAC will publish communication toolkits for each Higg Index category: Higg Facility Tools; Higg Brand & Retail Tool; Higg Product Tools. When a Higg Index communication toolkit is released, your organization may publicly publish third-party verified scores from the Higg Index modules, as defined in the toolkit.

Where to Share Your Higg Index Story

- Website
- CSR Report
- Company presentations
- Social media
- Newsletters
- Trade Fairs
- Media Outlets

Higg Index Transparency Platform

A website dedicated to Higg Index Transparency, transparency.higg.org, will launch in beta version in 2019. All SAC members and Higg Index customers will have the option to be featured on this platform.

Organizations that use the Higg Index may elect to include their third-party verified Higg Index scores on the platform starting in 2020. To learn more, contact support@apparelcoalition.org.
Higg Index customer recognition

Higg Index customers may choose to be featured on the SAC website annually.

Once a year, the SAC will invite Higg Index customers to opt-in to including their factory’s name in a list of Higg Index factories featured on the SAC website.

Higg Index customers also have the option to print or feature online a certificate and badges indicating completion of a self-assessment on the Higg.org platform and the successful verification of a module.
Communications examples

Members can use and adapt the following examples to their own internal and external communications:

• “Using the Higg Index to measure our environmental and social performance enabled us to improve our four key sustainability focus areas between 20XX and 20XX.”

• “The Higg Index helped us measure environmental sustainability performance. We then developed a plan to improve water efficiency by 20XX.”

• “The Higg Index is the basis of our sustainability strategy. It helps us determine which practices we should improve in order to operate in a more sustainable way. We use Higg Index data to adapt our sustainability goals each year. Thanks to the Higg Index, by 20XX we will decrease water use by X%.”

• “We are happy to announce that we are rolling out the Higg Index to XX percent of our tier 1 suppliers by 20XX.”

• “We use the Higg Facility Social & Labor Module to assess our organization’s social performance. Thanks to Higg FSLM, we are committed to paying our workers digitally, to empower them and support their well-being.”

• “The Higg Index is a holistic standard of measurement that assesses social and environmental impacts and drives sustainability improvement in the apparel, footwear, and textile industry. The Higg Index is developed by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition a multi-stakeholder organization of more than 240 brands, retailers, manufacturers, NGOs, government organizations, and academic institutions.”
External communications featuring SAC and the Higg Index

Corporate social responsibility reports

**Fenix Outdoor** *(SAC & Higg Index featured on pages 6, 13, 19)*

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**Gap** *(SAC & Higg Index featured on pages 5 & 43)*

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**PVH** *(SAC & Higg Index featured on pages 14 & 17)* with a quote from SAC CEO Jason Kibbey

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**Crystal Group** *(SAC & Higg Index featured on page 29)*

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News

**Sourcing Journal: The Biggest Sustainability Themes of 2019? Industry Experts Weigh In.**

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**San Francisco Chronicle article; Are Your Clothes Killing the Planet?**

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**How Volcom’s “New Future Alliance” Is Making an Impact with Environmental and Social Responsibility**

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**Outside Magazine: REI Announces New Sustainability Standards**

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**Crystal factories to adopt Higg Index FEM in 2018**

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**Raconteur: Saving planet Earth is more than a fashion fad**

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Allowed usage of the Sustainable Apparel Coalition and the Higg Index Trademarks

Names and logos

Only SAC members may use the SAC logo in promotional materials to indicate membership within the Coalition. Non-member Higg Index customers may only use the Higg Index logo in promotional materials.

Higg Index tool names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Higg Design &amp; Development Module</th>
<th>(Higg DDM)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Higg Materials Sustainability Index</td>
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Terms of Use: Sustainable Apparel Coalition and the Higg Index

The Higg Index trademark is owned by the SAC. Currently permitted uses are as follows:

PERMITTED USES BY AN SAC MEMBER ("Member") AS STATED IN THE SAC MEMBERSHIP AGREEMENT.

Corporate Social Responsibility ("CSR") Reporting and Member Marketing Permitted Uses. Member may use the Higg Index name and the Higg Index logo for the purposes of CSR and sustainability reporting and Member marketing. In these instances, Member may use the Higg Index name and/or Higg Index logo for the express purpose of communicating Member’s participation in the development of the Higg Index, if applicable, and/or for communicating that the member is utilizing the Higg Index platform.

Member Partnerships with the SAC Permitted Uses. If Member has a signed agreement with the SAC to provide Higg Index related services to the SAC membership, Member may use the Higg Index name and/or Higg Index logo to communicate and/or market its services to the membership.

PERMITTED USES BY HIGG INDEX CUSTOMERS AND SAC MEMBERS THAT UTILIZE THE HIGG INDEX TOOLS, AS STATED IN THE HIGG INDEX TOOLS TERMS OF USE.

a. Custom Material Scores: Higg MSI users who have customized their materials may communicate Higg MSI scores to other businesses, but not to consumers (or the public).

b. Raw Materials and Production Process Scores: Higg MSI users may communicate Higg MSI scores for individual raw materials processes publicly, since that information is already publicly available. However, the following attribution statement must be included with any public reference to these Higg MSI scores: “These results were calculated using the Higg MSI tools provided by the Sustainable Apparel Coalition. The Higg MSI tools assess impacts of materials from cradle-to-gate for a finished material (i.e. to the point at which the materials are ready to be assembled into a product). The Higg MSI scores provided herein are for a single production stage within the Higg MSI scope (e.g. fiber or raw material) and do not provide a holistic view of the impacts involved with material production.”

Please also include the date on which the information was retrieved and a link to the Higg MSI website (https://msi.higg.org/page/msi-home).

c. The Higg MSI cannot be used to make general environmental claims about materials such as “green,” “environmentally-friendly,” “least impact,” or “environmentally-responsible.” SAC does not verify any results Higg MSI users calculate using the Higg MSI and therefore the Higg MSI cannot be referenced in any such claims about product or environmental performance.

d. See https://product.higg.org/terms-of-use#terms-applicable-to-all-higg-product-tool-users for other permitted uses by a Higg MSI customer.
Media contact information

For questions in relation to this document, communicating about the Higg Index, and Higg Index transparency, please contact support@apparelcoalition.org.

All press and press release inquiries regarding the SAC and the Higg Index should be directed to press@apparelcoalition.org.

SAC members and Higg Index customers must refer journalists seeking non-public information about the SAC and the Higg Index to the SAC primary press contact, Alexandra Rosas, alexandra@apparelcoalition.org. The primary press contact serves as a common communications gatekeeper and determines when the involvement of the SAC spokesperson is required.