Professional Services

Pathways to a Competitive Low-Carbon Future

Sector Overview

NAICS Codes: 54 – Professional, Scientific and Technical Services[1]

The professional services sector provides specialized knowledge and advisory services rather than physical goods. Activities typically occur in offices or remote environments and include fields such as accounting, engineering consulting, legal services, management consulting, architecture, marketing, and financial advisory. In Canada in 2024, the sector included approximately 500,000 businesses, employed over 1.2 million people, and contributed about $133 billion to the GDP. [1] [2]

Energy Use & Emission Sources

GHG Emissions: 11 Mt CO2eq (1.5% of Canada's emissions) [3]

Most firms are small or medium-sized enterprises. While individual companies have relatively low energy use, the sector's combined footprint is still significant. On-site energy use is limited to office premises: heat for space and water heating, mostly from natural gas and then electricity, with further electricity for cooling and ventilation, lighting, computers, and servers. Direct emissions are correspondingly low, from on-site combustion, refrigerant leakage, and company vehicles. Since many firms lease their premises, control over heating equipment and metering often rests with the landlord. Indirect emissions can be more significant, including purchased electricity, commuting, business travel, office equipment and supplies, and digital services, where the energy use occurs at a third-party data centre rather than on-site.

Key Emission Sources & Decarbonization Actions

1 **Business Premises**

Direct & Indirect Emissions

Description

Key Actions

» Replace fossil-fuel heating systems with electric heat pumps or low-carbon district heating.

[1] Some businesses considered 'professional services' are excluded from this category including medical and dental clinics, other health-related business, educational establishments, and businesses offering specialized services to the fossil energy extraction sector. These companies have characteristics that separate them from this guide.

Space and water heating, air-conditioning, lighting, powering computers and servers.

- Increase building efficiency with upgrades such as improved insulation, door and window sealing, smart controls, or efficient equipment.
- Procure renewable electricity or renewable energy certificates where feasible.

2 Employee Travel

Indirect Emissions 

Description
Daily commuting and business travel by car, rail, or air.

Key Actions
- Encourage public transit, walking and biking to the facility.
- Support electric vehicle adoption with on-site chargers.
- Encourage remote work and virtual meetings.
- Prioritize rail over air travel for short to medium journeys.

3 Supplies & Services

Indirect Emissions 

Description
Production and transportation of office supplies, furniture, computers, and digital services such as cloud computing or data processing.

Key Actions
- Procure low-carbon or recycled office products.
- Shift toward digital workflows to reduce paper consumption.
- Work with suppliers that track and reduce their emissions.

4 Client Advice

Indirect Emissions 

Description
Indirect effect of advice provided to clients on emissions.

Key Actions
- Provide staff training on climate mitigation and sustainable practices.
- Position the firm as a thought leader in low-carbon advisory services.

Growth & Competitiveness Benefits

Market Growth

As the economy decarbonizes, demand for expertise in climate strategy, sustainable design, and low-carbon technologies will grow. Professional services firms can capture new opportunities by helping businesses navigate decarbonization, regulatory requirements, and climate risk.

Brand Reputation & Leadership

Developing a credible decarbonization strategy enhances corporate reputation, strengthens relationships with clients and investors, and helps attract talent. Demonstrating climate leadership can also differentiate firms in competitive service markets.

Additional Resources

Professional Services Net-Zero Primer →	See our full primer developed in collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada to get started.
GHG Protocol →	Guidance on calculating Scopes 1, 2, and 3 emissions and communicating results consistently.
ISO 14064 →	International standard to quantify, report, and verify GHG inventories by third parties.
Net-Zero Challenge →	Voluntary net-zero commitment program from the Government of Canada.