

THE CITY OF  
**COLUMBUS**  
ANDREW J. GINTHER, MAYOR



HOW-TO GUIDE:  
FORMING A **GREEN TEAM**  
AT WORK



# INTRODUCTION

This guide is to provide ideas and examples of how a business can structure a green team to advance sustainability at that business. Each business is different. What works in one may not work in another and the speed at which goals are met will vary. Remember that while being sustainable takes time and requires a long term commitment from all levels of an organization, a green team can help advance key initiatives. When promoting sustainability internally try to tie it to the mission, goals, and initiatives of your business.

A few green actions are mentioned in this guide. For more than 100 actions check out the GreenSpot program:  
[www.ColumbusGreenSpot.org](http://www.ColumbusGreenSpot.org).

GreenSpot is a City of Columbus program that inspires, educates, and recognizes households, businesses, and community groups that adopt sustainable practices. An organization doesn't have to be in Columbus to join (anywhere in Central Ohio is eligible) and it is a free program. More than 17,000 have made the pledge and joining takes less than 10 minutes.

For more information regarding the City of Columbus' environmental programs, check out Sustainable Columbus at [www.columbus.gov/getgreen/](http://www.columbus.gov/getgreen/).

**A Nielsen study in 2015 showed that 66% of online consumers are willing to pay more if the company has a positive social/environmental impact. <sup>1</sup>**

## BENEFITS OF ADOPTING GREEN PRACTICES:

- Cost savings and efficiency gains
- Positive public relations
- Increased customer base
- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions
- Improvement of employee morale
- Wise use of funds
- Decreased use of resources without sacrificing comfort
- Helping to meet compliance regulations
- The satisfaction of doing 'the right thing'

1. (Nielsen Study)  
<http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/news/2015/green-generation-millennials-say-sustainability-is-a-shopping-priority.html>



# PLANNING FOR THE GREEN TEAM

Before the first meeting of the green team a lot of planning should happen. Whether you are structuring the team to be top down, bottom up, or a hybrid, you will need approval from top management and/or the CEO/president. Drafting a potential budget will help prioritize actions later. Think about your audience and tailor your message to them.

Below are examples of tailored messages:

**Finance** Highlight that many green practices can see a return on investment in as little as a year. For example:



- Nationwide Insurance received \$487,000 in Grid Smart rebates from AEP.
- Indianola Children's Center saves \$600 a year by reducing their paper towel use with towels.
- The Gilbane Building Company saves \$200 a year by switching to reusable plates, glasses, and silverware in lieu of disposable plates, cups, and plastic utensils (ROI three years).

**Public Relations**



Going green is a great way to promote your organization as a responsible community and environmental steward. Success can be included in annual reports and social media posts. Organizations like Mars Petcare, US; Scotts Miracle-Gro; the City of Columbus; and Giant Eagle publish a sustainability report for the public to view. Customers will feel good about purchasing your products and/or services knowing that you have shared values. In addition, if your business rents space you could market it as a green venue.

**Maintenance Staff**



Green cleaning products could be cheaper and not as toxic to staff and the environment. Handling fewer harmful materials means fewer sick days, easier cleanups and safer storage. Nationwide Children's Hospital uses a suite of green cleaning products such as microfiber mops which use less water and reduce work-related injuries.

# PLANNING FOR THE GREEN TEAM, CONTINUED

## President/ CEO

Adopting sustainable practices can help you keep pace with or surpass the competition. Sustainable practices could make your business eligible for awards and could help with compliance.



Each year the GreenSpot program highlights a large, medium, and small business that has demonstrated exceptional efforts in sustainability. Twenty-seven businesses have received this award since GreenSpot started in 2008. See the [Green Spotlight Awards](#) for more information.

**Did you know that the  
Ohio EPA has an awards  
program called  
Encouraging  
Environmental  
Excellence?**

**Learn more...**

## Human Resources

A research report by the Society for Human Resource Management found that the top five positive outcomes from sustainability initiatives include:



- Improved employee morale
- More efficient business processes
- Stronger public image
- Increased employee loyalty
- Increased brand recognition



# STRUCTURE OF YOUR GREEN TEAM

There are different ways to structure the green team and it really is business-specific. Things to think about are the **size**, **sector**, and **organizational structure** of your business. Below is an example of how one medium sized (60 employees) business structures their green team.

**Example:** After getting buy-in from the CEO, Company A began forming their internal green team. Their team consisted of ten employees. They made sure at least one person from the 4 different departments (media relations, upper management, sales, and distribution) was represented. They did this through talking with department leaders. The team met every other month and subcommittees (ex. recycling committee) met monthly. Each meeting was not to exceed 1.5 hours with most being no more than one hour. At the full green team meetings the committees would report back on their progress and any obstacles they were having. The green team would give them feedback. Additionally, the full green team brainstormed different ideas of how to educate staff on sustainability at home (Example: promoting the benefits of the GreenSpot program like the \$50 rain barrel rebate). Every quarter the green team worked with their communications department to share organization-wide progress, plans, and opportunities for employees to engage. After each meeting the notes were sent to a representative in the CEO's office.

## OTHER TIPS ON HOW TO FORM A GREEN TEAM:

- Have a core group of people (3-4) set the green agenda and recruit folks to work on those actions.
- If you experience resistance to form an “official” green team, see if you can form an “unofficial” green team that holds lunch-and-learns with staff while advancing small initiatives such as adding recycling sorting signage.
- Depending on the interest level of staff, you could then make the case to formalize the green team.
- Keep in mind that a successful green team needs to be flexible.
- Keeping members engaged through encouragement and coming together for regular updates on projects can really help strengthen the team.




# RECRUITING FOR THE GREEN TEAM

Recruiting for your green team can be fun and a great way to raise the level of sustainability in your organization. An easy way to recruit for the green team is to email staff (or department heads) asking who would like to be involved and when the first meeting will take place. Other ways include getting on the agenda of the all-staff meeting and making an announcement or setting up a sign in-sheet in the break room. You know your organization, so tailor your outreach approach to them and don't forget to be creative!

You can also include what the first meeting will cover such as:

- Expectations
- Responsibilities
- Developing objectives and goals
- Future meeting times



Depending on the response rate, you may need to reach out one-to-one to assure each department is represented. You could bring in an outside speaker to demonstrate to staff the importance of this topic and how their actions contribute to the broader community.

Think about surveying those interested on where their intrigue lies. [See Appendix B for a sample survey.](#) Topics could include:



Waste Reduction  
(Reduce, Reuse, Recycle)



Conserving &  
Protecting Water



Conserving  
Energy



Green  
Transportation



Informing &  
Engaging Others



Green  
Cleaning

# FORMING PROJECTS FOR THE GREEN TEAM

During the first meeting you can set expectations. These could include the number of green team meetings participants are expected to attend, that everyone needs to contribute to achieving the goals, the number of hours allowed to work on projects, and the expectation that each will share information with their department, etc. [See Appendix A for examples on responsibilities and requirements.](#)



If you survey potential members on their interests, share the results! This can be an opportunity to see where the interests lie. A way to rank the priorities is how they fit with your business' overall environmental goals (if there are any) and mission. Some questions to consider as a team include:

- What are some of the areas of interest?
- Are there specific actions that were stated or can be derived from these areas? Are they achievable?
- What are the high impact/low impact; high effort/low effort ideas?
- How will efforts be tracked?
- Are there goals to engage the whole staff?
- How to include internal and external goals?



When you develop goals make sure to establish baseline metrics so you can determine if the goal was achieved. In fact, make sure to inventory the existing green actions your businesses is doing. This could help build momentum.

**Limitations:** More ideas than resources.

**Example:** If you rent space and have no say over the inefficient water fixtures consider trying to offset some of the impact by either offering a discount on rain barrels for employees, promoting the GreenSpot Community Backyards program (rebate on rain barrels and more), holding a tree planting event for staff on work time (you would need to work with human resources), or raising money for a nonprofit. Including all staff in an effort could create good will for the green team. Maybe all of the businesses in a building can come together and make a request for energy efficient fixtures (ex. lights, toilets, etc.) and/or recycling. Set up a process for a clearinghouse for great ideas and how to set goals and prioritize. Additionally, some projects may see a fast return on investment like changing lights to LEDs. You could use these savings towards other projects that have a slower return on investment.



# FORMING PROJECTS FOR THE GREEN TEAM, CONTINUED

For goals that need long term maintenance think about what resources are needed to ensure success. **Examples of goals per category:**

## Waste reduction (reduce, reuse, recycle)



- Implement a recycling program.
- Buy supplies made from recycled materials.
- Switch to paperless dryers in the restrooms.

## Conserving & protecting water



- Switch out sink faucets to WaterSense labeled options.
- Encourage employees to report water leaks.

## Conserving energy



- Use rebate programs to retrofit lighting to LED.
- Perform an energy audit.

**FOR A LIST OF OVER 100 GREEN IDEAS, CHECK OUT THE GREENSPOT APPLICATION:**

[HTTPS://MYGREENSPOT.COLUMBUS.GOV/COMMUNITY/MAIN/](https://mygreenspot.columbus.gov/community/main/)

## Green Transportation



- Provide a bike rack outside the office (If your business is in Columbus you could get a free bike rack and installation. Call 614-645-3111 city services for more details).
- Designate at least one parking spot for "green" vehicles.
- Provide bus pass reimbursement programs.

## Informing and engaging others



- Include a green tip to staff each week and/or ask GreenSpot (or other local organizations) to present about sustainability to staff.
- Hold a volunteer day with a local environmental nonprofit.
- Take a trip to the SWACO landfill or Rumpke recycling center.

## Green cleaning



- Work with custodial to identify what is being used and if there is a green alternative.
- Install floor mats at front doors to improve indoor air quality.
- Provide or email staff tips on green cleaning at home.





# IMPLEMENTING PROJECTS THAT WORK

Once a team has set an objective they can start planning how to implement it. A few considerations are cost, timeline, and funding. Below is an example of implementing a recycling program:



- 1** A team has set out to implement a recycling program at work. The first step is to research if the current waste hauler provides recycling as an option. They then asked the hauler for information about how often landfill containers are collected, how full they are, etc. Next, they talked with the head of custodial to answer any concerns and to determine what type of equipment they will need (like a special dumpster).
- 2** The team researched how many desk side recycling containers were needed and where larger ones would go (i.e. common spaces like break rooms). They created a cost proposal for the executive manager to review. The funds requested would cover the cost of the desk bins, general area bins, and hauling. They found in their research that all recycling bins should be the same in order to keep branding consistent.
- 3** The team then developed educational materials detailing what is recyclable and what is not. They contacted SWACO ([outreach@swaco.org](mailto:outreach@swaco.org)) for examples of signs. It is important that all signs be consistent in order to reduce confusion. These materials were hung in common areas as a reminder. A flyer was emailed to staff as a reminder.
- 4** They picked a goal of reducing the number of trash bags by 25% through recycling and reducing efforts. If staff achieved this goal after one year there would be 10 gift cards raffled off (they have a staff of 75). Each quarter the recycling team would update staff on the progress. At the end of the year they achieved a 35% reduction in waste through recycling.
- 5** A social media post was created to share their success. They will continue to monitor how much is recycled and periodically report to staff. If the number goes down significantly they will do another educational campaign.

**IN THE GREEN TEAM, THE LEAD ON RECYCLING WAS RECOGNIZED FOR HER EFFORTS WITH A CARD AND GIFT CERTIFICATE. REALLY SHARE YOUR SUCCESS WITH STAFF. PUBLICIZE IT!**

Another action your budding green team could take would be to hire a company to perform a waste audit. The results would inform you of what is being thrown away that could be recycled and could help with messaging. For more information about performing a waste audit, see SWACO's free DIY tool: <https://www.swaco.org/369/Understand-Your-Waste>. Another audit is recommended 6 months after installing recycling infrastructure to see if waste is decreasing and recycling increasing.



# EVALUATING THE PROJECTS & LESSONS LEARNED

In the above example of recycling, the green team worked with the recycling hauler to determine how many pounds of recycling was collected and what the contamination rate was. Midway through their project they discovered people were throwing plastic cups in the recycling bin thinking they were recyclable. The green team sent out an email reminding staff that they are not recyclable. They also made a sign out of used plastic cups that spelled out “Trash.” They placed this above the trash can (which is next to the recycling can).



When each project is complete, hold a meeting to discuss what went well and lessons learned. Think about how much water was saved, energy reduced, cost savings, trees planted, greenhouse gas reductions, etc. If you had great success consider letting your staff and customers know through internal emails, social media, newsletter, and/or press release/press event. Make sure any materials are consistent with your company's branding and marketing.

Share your successes with GreenSpot as well as other businesses.



THIS GUIDE WAS A COLLABORATIVE EFFORT BETWEEN THE FOLLOWING PARTNERS:

- Ohio History Connection
- Nestle, Quality Assurance Center
- Franklin Park Conservatory
- GreenSpot Advisory Board
- Grange Insurance Audubon Center
- Columbus GreenSpot
- Solid Waste Authority of Central Ohio (SWACO)
- Earth Share Ohio
- Columbus Department of Public Utilities



Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Department: \_\_\_\_\_

Associate #: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The following are responsibilities and requirements as a Green Team member. Please review and sign the statement at the bottom of the form if you are in agreement.

### Responsibilities:

- Attend and actively participate in Green Team meetings every two weeks (or as needed). No phones or computer use during meetings.
- Attend additional trainings as determined.
- The Department Green Team Liaison's duty is to relay messages and concerns from department to Green Team Leaders as needed.
- Communicate Green Team messages and measures during meetings.
- Communicate to supervisor/manager when a time commitment is needed.
- Participate as a team member in Green Team initiatives.

### Requirements:

- Time commitment 4 hours per month (bi-weekly meetings, communication to dept., project initiatives).
- Minimum 1 year commitment.
- Participate in Green Team meetings (bi-weekly then monthly once recycling and composting are successfully implemented) 2 hours/month. Attend 80% of meetings.
- Work on new initiatives in your area or facility wide 2 hours/month.
- Share information with your department.
- Update bulletin board when assigned.
- Present in monthly meetings when assigned.
- At minimum, one volunteer activity outside in the community as a team during a year, as determined.
- Participate in at least one onsite event led by the Green Team.
- Co-host one lunch-and-learn per year on an environmental topic for the facility (maximum of 3 people to co-host a topic)

\*\*Maximum of 2 consecutive years of service on the Green Team is permitted to allow growth opportunities for others.



**Green Team Member Pledge:**

I understand the requirements of participating on the Green Team and will work towards the committee objectives. If I fail to meet the requirements, I understand I might be asked to leave the Team in the future.

Associate Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**Green Team Member Supervisor Commitment:**

I understand the requirements necessary for \_\_\_\_\_ to be on the Green Team and will support them by providing time and resources o meet the commitment.

Supervisor Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Manager Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_



Title: Sustainability Survey

Description: Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey below. Our company is committed to going green and will form a green team to identify short, medium and long term goals.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Department: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Areas of Interest (check all that apply):

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Education                       | <input type="checkbox"/> Reduce, Reuse, Recycle |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conserving and Protecting Water | <input type="checkbox"/> Green Transportation   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Conserving Energy               | <input type="checkbox"/> Green Cleaning         |

Do you have any specific actions you think we should take to go green?

Thank you for filling out this survey! We will contact you in about a month with our meeting schedule.





INSPIRE   EDUCATE   RECOGNIZE