

GUIDE FOR STARTING A GREEN TEAM

*Developed in September 2020 by Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful (KTMB, www.ktmb.org)
with funding from the Washoe County Health District.*

Green teams are instrumental in creating positive environmental change within an organization.

This guide provides tools needed to set up and implement a successful green team. The guide covers:

- 1. Start a Green Team**
- 2. Set Goals**
- 3. Reduce Waste**
- 4. Stay Engaged & Energized**
- 5. Share Achievements**
- 6. Resources**





START A GREEN TEAM

Gain Management Support

Gaining the support of management is important to ensure the team has the resources it needs to be successful.

Before meeting with management, prepare a strong value statement to articulate the green team's benefit to the organization. The value statement should define why green business practices are meaningful to the business, employees, and customers.

Use examples that resonate with management and clearly define the benefits a green team can offer, such as:

Cost Savings. Reducing costs associated with energy, water, waste, and transportation.

Attracting & Retaining Talent. Improving employee morale and satisfaction.

Customer Expectations. Strengthening brand and increasing market share.

Regulatory Compliance. Staying ahead of new regulations and requirements.

Aligning Practices with Values. Demonstrating commitment through actions.

More than 80% of US workers polled believe it is important to work for an organization that makes the environment a top priority.ⁱ

The vast majority of millennials – 83% – would be more loyal to a company that helps them contribute to environmental issues.ⁱⁱ

Recruit Members

Recruit team members from all levels and departments within the organization. Look for team members who are:

- Enthusiastic about the green team's mission.
- Able to regularly attend meetings.
- Available to take on project responsibilities.
- Knowledgeable about the area of the organization they are representing.
- Representative of key divisions such as operations, procurement, and management.

Schedule Kick-Off Meeting

A kick-off meeting is a great way to build excitement. Agenda items might address:

Purpose: Allow each participant to explain why they want to be part of the team, what they bring to the team, and what they hope the team will accomplish.

Responsibilities & Expectations: Clearly communicate what is expected from team members, such as:

- regularity of meetings and attendance expectations
- hours allocated to work on projects
- role as liaison to their department to relay information and gathering input
- update team members on project assignments, and
- participation in employee engagement efforts.

Brainstorm: Gather ideas from members on potential actions the team could take and rank actions to prioritize efforts.

Establish a Baseline: Describe how the team will collect baseline information on waste generation and recycling, energy and water use, fleet fuel use, and employee commute behaviors.

When seeking potential green team members, look for people who already practice green habits in their daily lives. And keep in mind that a successful green team needs to be flexible.

Celebrate the first meeting by offering lunch! Encourage members to bring their own cups, plates, utensils, and napkins to avoid purchasing single-use plastics or creating excess waste.

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- <https://recyclingatwork.org/Downloads/R@W%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf>
 - <https://sustainablebrands.com/read/organizational-change/3-4-of-millennials-would-take-a-pay-cut-to-work-for-a-socially-responsible-company>



Image Courtesy of Carson Water Subconservancy District

SET GOALS & PRIORITIES

Dream big and start small. Establishing and prioritizing clear goals will help keep the team focused and motivated, and provide the team, coworkers and management with a clear picture of what the team accomplishes.

Make a Plan

Write a simple sustainability plan that incorporates focus areas, baseline metrics, goals, and prioritized actions. The plan will act as a road map for the green team.

To gain broader input, survey a broader group on focus areas and priorities. Consider recommending actions that align with the Nevada Green Business Program checklist.

Establish a Baseline

Measure historic usage in focus areas such as electricity, natural gas, water, waste, recycling, and purchasing of high-volume products such as paper and cleaning supplies. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, set short- and long-term performance goals. Then identify and prioritize actions for achieving goals.

NEVADA GREEN BUSINESS PROGRAM AREAS

- Energy Efficiency
- Green Cleaning
- Recycling & Composting
- Environmental Procurement & Packaging
- Paper Use & Single-Use Plastics
- Employee Commute Alternatives
- Watershed Protection
- Water Conservation
- Native, Drought-Tolerant Landscapes
- Inform & Engage Employees

Set Goals & Prioritize

Prioritizing goals will help guide the direction of the green team’s activities and initiatives. These exercises offer examples of ways to approach goal setting and prioritization.

A good goal is specific, contains actions, and can be measured and accomplished in a reasonable timeframe. Choose goals that green team members, staff, and management can stand behind and be excited about.

Example 1: IMPACT / EFFORT ANALYSIS

This method is used to identify priorities by evaluating the actions using a four-part matrix with high/low and effort/impact labels.

PRIORITY ACTION	High Effort	Low Effort
High Impact	2	3
Low Impact	1	2

Effort can mean financial costs, employee time, and/or organizational challenges. Impact can relate to the natural environment, business operations, employees or customers, and/or health and wellness.

As a group, fill in each of the four boxes with the focus areas and actions that were identified in the plan. Discuss as a team the effort and impact for each action to understand the benefits and challenges from a broader perspective.

The actions that land in the high impact / low effort may present opportunities for early wins. Actions that are deemed to result in low impact and require high effort may need to be reevaluated and deleted from the plan.

Example 2: BRAINSTORM & VOTE

Collaborating on goal identification and voting is a democratic process that can lead to strong buy-in. Ask green team members and others to participate in a brainstorming session. Write down all suggested goals, priorities, and actions. Consolidate similar ideas, then vote.

Allow participants a set number of votes, three to five votes for example, to designate what they view as the most important priorities. Tally and then discuss the results. The ideas with the most votes become the focus areas.



ONLY RAIN IN THE STORM DRAIN

In many communities in Nevada, rainwater that falls onto paved surfaces, such as streets, buildings, sidewalks, and parking lots become surface water runoff. Runoff collects pollutants such as pet waste, pesticides, oil and grease, and trash as it flows to the nearest storm drain. This runoff carries pollutants straight to local waterbodies that supply our primary source of drinking water. Businesses can help to protect local waterways – Lake Tahoe, Truckee River, Pyramid Lake, Carson River, Lake Mead, and others – by ensuring only rainwater reaches the storm drain.

Learn more at www.tmstormwater.com.

PRIORITIES	VOTES
Energy Efficiency	12
Green Cleaning	8
Recycling & Composting	12
Green Procurement & Packaging	11
Paper Use & Single-Use Plastics	7
Employee Commute Alternatives	10
Watershed Protection	9
Water Conservation	12
Native, Drought-Tolerant Landscapes	7
Inform & Engage Employees	12

With each step, explore and uncover potential risks, obstacles or barriers, and opportunities. Establish a time frame for completing each step and accomplishing the vision.

The Natural Step (www.naturalstep.ca) identifies these four steps:

- **Awareness and Visioning:** Gain a common understanding, set goals, establish a vision for a future state.
- **Baseline Mapping:** Analysis of current conditions, social context and organization culture, and opportunities and obstacles related to goals and vision.
- **Creative Solutions:** Brainstorm potential solutions for advancing opportunities and overcoming obstacles to actualize vision.
- **Decide on Priorities:** Prioritize and develop an implementation plan.

This exercise can lead to greater success as each step is analyzed and the team explores potential solutions to obstacles and barriers.

Example 3: BACKCASTING

This method works backwards from the team's shared vision of the outcome or desired future of a specific goal, priority or action. Clearly articulate the vision and then work backward to identify the steps required to get there.

Cost Benefits Analysis

Additional tools can be used to facilitate backcasting exercises like the cost / benefit analysis table below.

COST / BENEFIT ANALYSIS TABLE

RECYCLING & COMPOSTING	Year 1	Year 2	Year 3	Year 4
INCREASE RECYCLING RATE	40%	60%	70%	75%
ACTIONS	Place recycling & composting bins next to trash bins.	Employee education & post signage.	Install hand dryers & dishwasher.	Reduce paper use & purchase of single-use plastic products.
WASTE HAULING COSTS	\$1,500	\$1,000	\$850	\$750
SAVINGS	\$0	\$500	\$650	\$750



WASTE PREVENTION & RECYCLING

Waste prevention saves resources and cuts costs by encouraging more efficient use of materials. It reduces pollution associated with extracting raw materials, manufacturing excess items, and disposing of waste.

Start a Program

Steps to starting a program include:

Evaluate: The first step is to evaluate the workplace waste and recycling program, as well as employee behaviors through a waste audit. (See Additional Resources for a waste audit guide.)

Plan: Identify opportunities for reducing waste generation, reusing products or materials, and increasing recycling. Make a plan for how best to take advantage of those opportunities.

Implement: Implement the priorities and actions captured in the plan. Take into consideration that although recycling is an important part of any waste management strategy, reducing and reusing are the least-cost and most environmentally-friendly options.

Monitor: Monitor and track progress and identify areas for improvement. Design solutions that

continue to make waste reduction, reuse, and recycling easier for employees.

Reduce & Reuse!

Businesses can reduce waste and reuse products and materials easily. A few simple ideas can help start a “Reduce & Reuse” program.

Reduce Paper Usage & Waste

- Set printer and copier defaults to duplex and set expectations for two-sided printing.
- Use electronic means of communication whenever possible. Employees can discourage the printing of emails by adding “Please consider the environment before printing” messaging to emails.
- Instead of making individual copies of memos and notices to employees, use a central bulletin board for internal communications.
- Limit the number of periodicals and catalogues the business receives. Consider digital subscriptions when available.
- Buy paper that is either 100% recycled-content, FSC-Certified, or with at least 30% post-consumer recycled-content.

The University of Berkeley, CA saves \$60,000 a year through waste reduction and recycling.ⁱ

The average worker uses 10,000 sheets of copy paper each year. Setting defaults to print on both sides can save between 30-50% of paper costs.ⁱⁱ

Hunt Valley Elementary School in Springfield, VA joined *These Come From Trees* K-12 Challenge and reduced paper towel use by 29% in one year, saving 18 trees and \$840.

In 2012, Intuit's Reno Office saw a \$40,000 savings after switching from paper cups and plates to reusable dishware.

- Order and place ***"These Come From Trees"*** stickers or signage on paper towel dispensers, printers, and copiers.

- Use on-site shredded paper as packaging material instead of purchasing new bubble wrap or foam.

Reduce Single-Use Plastic

Eliminating purchase of single-use plastic items can reduce waste and lead to savings. When replacing disposable dishware and utensils with reusable products, it may be worthwhile to invest in a dishwasher depending on the size of the business. A few easy actions to consider are:

- Eliminate purchase of single-use water bottles for employees and guests.
- Use a coffee machine that doesn't require single-use pods.
- Provide reusable coffee mugs, glasses, dishes, and utensils.

Miscellaneous Actions

- For catered work events or employee parties, use reusable dishware or consider having employees bring their own cup, plate, and utensils for events. Serve food "buffet style" and provide pitchers for serving beverages along with drinking glasses.
- Eliminate purchase of individually-wrapped or packaged items like sugar and sweetener packets, coffee creamers, seasoning packets, and condiments. Purchase items that are sold in bulk or large containers.
- Designate a "no waste" day each month to see how much waste can be reduced. This can also be the perfect activity in April as part of an Earth Day challenge or for Plastic Free July.

Reuse Strategies

Businesses can reuse materials in a creative or efficient way. Some examples include:

- Collecting reusable items (e.g., old office supplies, furniture and equipment) for donation to local charities or other organizations in need.
- Create an office supply reuse station. (Remember the old saying, one man's trash is another man's treasure?)
- Buy second-hand office supplies, equipment and furniture.
- Maintain a listing of free, used materials and make it available to employees.

Recycle!

Set up a recycling program that reflects the materials collected through the solid waste service provider(s). Recycling is good for the environment! It reduces the amount of material going into landfills and reduces the need for virgin materials.

Successful Recycling Program Elements

Make it easy. Supply both trash and recycling bins at workstations and in common areas.

Stay consistent. Locate recycling and compost bins next to all trash bins and place bins in convenient locations throughout the facility. Maintain consistent messaging on

bins and in communications to avoid confusion.

Engage janitorial staff. Make sure that all janitorial staff are trained and receive the same information on the program.

Ensure participation. Provide employee training materials and events to ensure high levels of participation and proper sorting of items for waste, recycling, and compost.

Target efforts. Utilize the results of waste audits to target efforts and motivate participation.

Post signage. Post signage at waste and recycling bin locations. Use friendly, clear, and consistent language, graphics and images.

Create flyers. Create materials to illustrate proper disposal of common waste and recycling materials and place flyers in common areas frequented by employees.

Update employees. Keep employees engaged through periodic email updates to all employees. Highlight the successful outcome of employee efforts, provide information on common, and offer answers to commonly-asked questions.

Consider bin design. Restrictive openings can help reduce contamination. If there are bins specifically for plastic bottles and/or cans, use a lid with a small circular opening. If bins are specifically for paper, use a lid with a long narrow slot.

Optimize bin placement. Place recycling bins next to trash bins to reduce contamination. Place bins in individual offices, common areas, and in high-traffic areas such as copy rooms and kitchens. Evaluate and select the type and/or size of bin based on volume, location, and usage. (See Additional Resources section for more information on setting up a successful recycling program.)



Waste audits can reveal recyclables that are ending up in trash bins or items that are contaminating recycling bins such as plastic cups that aren't recyclable and help to identify opportunities for improvement.

Reusable dishware and utensils can be inexpensively acquired second-hand at any thrift store or bought in bulk in places like Costco or Sam's Club.

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- i. UC Berkeley
<http://www.stopwaste.org/sites/default/files/Documents/ucb.pdf>
 - ii. https://www.epa.gov/sites/production/files/2013-09/documents/fec_automatic_duplexing.pdf



STAY ENGAGED & ENERGIZED

There are many easy ways to ensure the green team and staff are engaged and excited about the work they are doing.

Energize Green Teams

Green Team Leadership Rotation: Rotating leadership provides opportunities for all team members to lead the team's efforts.

Form Sub-committees: Using sub-committees can be an effective way to distribute responsibilities. Consider organizing through ad hoc task forces. Task forces organize around project or team needs, pull from the whole team's skills and disperse when the project is complete or the need is met.

Recognition: Consult with management about past and present green team victories. Ask how they might like to recognize the team's accomplishments.

Peer-to-Peer Green Team: Meet with other organizations' green teams to brainstorm and problem solve.

Taking the time needed to measure and track progress will provide returns when it's time to report to management, educate and engage employees, and evaluate what is and is not working and the overall success of the program.

Tap into people's competitive spirit. There's nothing better than the chance to win recognition or a prize to get people engaged.

Keep Truckee Meadows Beautiful offers free environmental presentations to businesses and organizations. Visit www.ktmb.org/community-education to learn more or to schedule a presentation!

Engage Staff

Engaging and energizing staff around green team initiatives is key to the team's success — after all, it's coworkers who implement the team's great ideas. When communicating with staff, think about it as an opportunity to educate and engage.

Suggested ways to communicate the team's efforts with staff are:

Staff Meetings: Give short updates at employee staff meetings to discuss latest projects, goals, and accomplishments; mention upcoming lunchtime presentations or educational opportunities.

Lunch and Learn: Lunchtime gatherings are a great way to raise awareness and engage and educate employees on sustainability issues.

Awards and Rewards: Present a "Green Team MVP" award on a monthly or quarterly basis, based on time and effort put into various projects and activities.

Collect nominations to recognize employee contributions to recycling, waste reduction, energy conservation, green purchasing, and other identified goals. Provide recognition for the recipients. Announce the winner at a meeting or event. Include an individual profile in the newsletter or website or provide recognition to an entire department.

Competition: Games, competitions, and challenges are some of the best ways to overcome green malaise. Consider organizing an event or competition around your greening goals. Challenges can engage employees by rewarding the best ideas or greatest participation in a green team initiative. Consider challenging staff to identify the green initiative with the greatest cost savings. (See Additional Resources for ideas on events, challenges, and games.)

Annual Sustainability Event: Organize an annual event to showcase accomplishments, educate, inspire, and recruit new people to the green team.

Employee Blog: Use a blog to share ideas, new information, and resources. Commit to offering fresh content weekly on a variety of green topics. Possible topics include:

- What do the chasing arrows and numbers really mean?
- What to do with an old CFL light bulb?
- How to recycle batteries.

Employee Intranet or Bulletin Board: Post updates, best practices, and helpful tips. Show reports of waste and recovery over the course of a year. Be sure to identify green team members so employees know who to contact with ideas or suggestions. Consider changing these bulletins monthly to follow with seasonal themes.

Employee Newsletters: Include a regular section for green team project updates or accomplishments. Include a quiz question, where all correct answers get entered into a drawing for a reward (ex: lunch, coffee, reusable water bottle). Or include a multiple question quiz and reward all staff who meet a minimum score.

Keep it simple and concrete and provide information multiple times and in a variety of ways. Most people need to see, hear, and do things several times before it becomes a comfortable habit.

Keep it fun. Creative and memorable activities will stick with employees much longer than the contents of a memo.

Keep it positive. Educate people in supportive ways that won't make them feel defensive. Avoid calling out specific people or departments for doing things wrong. Instead, offer examples of more positive actions.



SHARE ACHIEVEMENTS

Companies large and small have discovered that informing customers of their green practices can set them apart from their competitors.

Whether it's a webpage devoted to being green, or recognition received for green practices, there are many ways to communicate a commitment to sustainability.

Company Website: Many organizations are adding "Sustainability" or "Green Practices" sections to their websites as a way to communicate their commitment to being green to their customers. These webpages often explain the organization's goals and current green practices.

Sustainability Reports: Reports can range from informal quarterly reports to more formal annual reports. Reports can be distributed to staff or the public by email, intranet, or website.

Informal reports or simple updates are strengthened by using data collected to demonstrate the resources saved.

Recognition Programs: Green awards and certifications are a great way to demonstrate green actions to customers. Since they're awarded

by an outside party, these programs validate the authenticity of green practices.

Awards and certification applications can also be an excellent goal-setting tool for green teams as many list criteria that organizations must meet to be recognized. Achieving recognition is also a way to demonstrate the value of the green team to management and coworkers.

Storytelling: A few ideas to help get the word out about green practices are:

- **Share achievements:** Discuss green initiatives, green practices implemented, and success stories. Think of this as the organization's green resume. It's okay to share some upcoming projects, but couple these with goals already attained.
- **Highlight innovation:** Share the innovative tactics used to reduce energy, conserve water, lower paper consumption, or reuse and recycle products and materials.

Highlight green practices and share the return on investment. For example, "We saved \$200 a year by switching to reusable plates, glasses, and silverware in lieu of disposable plants, cups, and plastic utensils."

- **Talk about the people:** Feature team members and individuals that initiated specific green actions.
- **Be specific:** List data collected to demonstrate the impact made and resources saved. This data can be transformed into compelling equivalents such as number of cars removed from the road or number of trees saved.
- **List of challenges:** Include challenges overcome and new challenges that the team is working on.

Staff: An organization's staff can be their greatest overlooked marketing asset. Staff interact daily with clients, customers, guests, and visitors. Keep coworkers informed about the organization's green practices and achievements so they can share it with others.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

GENERAL

- Green Purchasing Fact Sheets. <http://www.stopwaste.org/at-work/green-purchasing/fact-sheets-guides-and-model-policy/green-purchasing-fact-sheets>
- How To Get Employee Engagement Right. <https://www.sustainablebusinesstoolkit.com/employee-engagement/>

SOLID WASTE

- KTMB Recycling Guide. <https://ktmb.org/recycle/>
- A 5-Step Guide to Conducting a Waste Audit. <https://www.dumpsters.com/blog/how-to-conduct-a-waste-audit>
- Recycling at Work: Research to Inform Improved Recycling in the Workplace. https://kab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/RecyclingatWork_Research_Report_2015.pdf
- A Guide to Workplace Composting. https://kab.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/A_Guide_to_Workplace_Composting_1.pdf
- Planning for Success: Ten Tips for Designing Public Space Recycling Programs. https://kab.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Planning_for_Success_Public_Space_Recycling_Programs_Fact_Sheet_0.pdf
- Recycling Case Studies <https://www.stopwaste.org/at-work/business-assistance/recycling-resources-case-studies/recycling-case-studies>
- Signage. <https://recyclingpartnership.org/signage/>
- Recycle everything with TerraCycle®. <https://www.terraCycle.com/en-US/>

ENERGY

- How Energy-Efficient Light Bulbs Compare with Traditional Incandescents. <https://www.energy.gov/energysaver/save-electricity-and-fuel/lighting-choices-save-you-money/how-energy-efficient-light>
- NV Energy. <https://www.nvenergy.com/save-with-powershift>

TRANSPORTATION

- RTC Washoe How to Ride Public Transportation. <https://www.rtcwashoe.com/public-transportation/how-to-ride/>
- RTC Washoe Bicycling and Bike Maps in English and Spanish. <https://www.rtcwashoe.com/public-transportation/bicycling/>

WATER

- WaterSense. <https://www.epa.gov/watersense>

This document was adapted from The City of Columbus, OH Green Spot "How-To: Forming a Green Team at Work" and the City of Portland Sustainability at Work "Green Team Guide".

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**WASHOE COUNTY
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ENHANCING QUALITY OF LIFE