



Green Government

An initiative of the National Association of Counties

Creating a Green County Team

● Introduction

As counties look to advance green government practices across their agencies and communities, a team of staff members can be brought together to help facilitate the effort. Whether a county is just beginning to think green or is already implementing a countywide green plan, an interagency “green team” can provide the necessary avenues to ensure unified action in meeting the county’s green goals.

Approaching the green issue in a team manner makes sense – helping the environment while also saving taxpayer dollars are actions all county staff members and departments impact in some way. A green team provides the necessary structure for an issue that can impact all county operations. Ultimately, the green goals of a county can affect everything from purchasing and procurement of paper, vehicles, and cleaning products to policies for land conservation, development, and employee commuter benefits.

● Creating the Green Team

With support of the county administration and county board, a green team may be tasked with:

- reviewing internal operations impacting the county’s triple bottom line (environment, economy/budget, and employees/society);
- evaluating the impact of policies on the green goals of the county; and
- creating a sense of commitment and common understanding of green actions among all levels of employees.

In New Castle County, Delaware, for example, the team’s mission is to create an open dialogue on environment and energy measures and to find ways to implement those measures.

Green issues can vary from county to county and ultimately help to determine priorities and a course of action for the team. Green issues may include:

- air quality
- recycling and waste management
- energy efficiency and renewable energy
- transportation and fleets
- water conservation and land preservation

- environmentally preferable purchasing.

Although the composition of each county’s green team will be unique, all green teams should strive for diversity in representatives from across agencies and staff levels. Such a diverse composition will not only identify risks and opportunities, but also ensure comprehensive buy-in from all departments. Representatives may include but are not limited to:

- Administration
- Finance/Procurement/General Services
- Health/Social Services
- Human Resources
- Facility Management/Public Works/Fleet Maintenance
- Natural Resources/Parks & Recreation
- Planning/Development
- Land Use/Transportation
- Public Information

● Green Team Tasks

Once the team is established, a first task may be to inventory the programs and activities related to the county’s identified green issues. The inventory may be used to help map the strategic goals for the team. The green team may subsequently develop government-wide and department-wide strategies and plans.

Sarasota County, Florida created its “Roadmap to Sustainability” to help institute broader organizational ownership and structure and establish metrics to effectively track the county’s efforts. The Roadmap to Sustainability has proven to be a tool to organize all staff and activities and ensure all are cognizant of the overall county initiatives. With this knowledge, all county staff, regardless of department or function, are empowered to institute sustainable practices in the workplace.

The county’s roadmap includes three key components: drivers (policy), vehicles (programs) and fuels (resources). The county opted to establish cross-discipline action teams for its seven issue areas of: environmental conservation, water conservation, waste reduction, energy reduction, transportation, facilities/construction, and community design/partnerships.

In King County, Washington, resources offered by its green team include a focus on green building:

- technical support and training on LEED (the U.S. Green Building Council’s Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design certification program) and other green building technologies for King County departments and offices;
- assistance with project review and budget analysis for county buildings;
- strategies and policies relating to green building;
- current list of county projects that are working to incorporate LEED criteria; and
- a Green Building Resource Center, including an electronic bibliography and online catalogue to provide staff with resources in project management, architecture, landscape architecture, design, budgeting, engineering and resource conservation.

● Green Team Coordination

The team should consider scheduling monthly meetings in addition to email work groups. A Microsoft Word or Microsoft Excel document may also be created to continually share accomplishments and track achievements toward green priority goals.

Team members should update their department or agency management members on the project status and should be given regular opportunity to keep the county board informed about the financial, environmental and social results.

● Conclusion

With the full support of the county board, a green team can help a county know where it has been and where it is going in the ever-widening green arena. The green team can be an effective force to integrate actions and policies to achieve a green government. Ultimately, the culture of green that this team will create throughout the county’s staff can expand to the entire community to help the county “go green.”

About the NACo Green Government Initiative

The NACo Green Government Initiative serves as a catalyst between local governments and the private sector to facilitate green government practices, products and policies that result in financial and environmental savings. Launched in 2007, the Initiative provides comprehensive resources for local governments on all things green, including energy, green building, air quality, transportation, water quality, land use, purchasing and recycling.

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