



# GREEN BUSINESS CERTIFICATION PROGRAM

## Forming a Green Team

### Overview

Green teams are a fundamental part of implementing and improving sustainability practices. Green Teams activate the organization’s sustainability mission, raise awareness of sustainable practices, and keep the green agenda on course.

The benefits from forming a cohesive Green Team are significant and include:

- Breaking down inter-departmental barriers to communication, building program participation and staff engagement, and allowing for greater efficiencies.
- Distributing the workload—lightening the burden on individuals so they can continue to perform other important staff functions.
- Providing a home for the “green” culture within your organization to germinate and grow.

**NOTE:** [Download our DEP Certification Resources](#) document for several excellent resources to guide your Green Team.

### Step-by-step Implementation Instructions

1. **Identify Core Members:** First, identify key representatives to lead your team, seeking diverse participation across the full-range of departments and business units.
2. **Build the Team:** Ideally, your green team would have 7-10 people representing the following functional areas or departments:

- Purchasing
- Human resources
- Sales
- Customer service
- Operations and facilities
- Legal
- IT
- Administration

An effective green team will have a mix of personalities and a combination of senior management, middle-management, and junior staff.

3. **Recruiting Members:** For a small business, the appropriate green team members should be self-evident. While some companies may choose to simply appoint members, others may find that an email inquiry is the best way to determine people's interest in joining the team. (Check out [“Green Team Guide to Getting Started”](#) for a sample email along with other tips.) Such an email might include the following:

- *Purpose* – what your company hopes to accomplish
- *Responsibility* – the type of issues to be addressed and decisions to be made



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- *Commitment* – the level of effort, including frequency and duration of meetings

**NOTE:** *make sure that this email is reviewed and approved by senior leadership, so that you have the authority to send it out and form the final team membership.*

4. **Kickoff meeting:** At the kickoff meeting members should set the “rules of the road” and lay the groundwork for how your Green Team will operate. This is when the team defines its mandate, sets up an organizational structure, drafts a charter (does not have to be extensive), and begins to develop a plan of action. With so much to cover, you’ll want to schedule a good amount of time—60 to 90 minutes—in order to cover all the issues at hand, including:

- *Team structure* – Elect a green team chair or co-chairs. The strongest candidates have enough seniority and knowledge to lead effectively AND have the time to do the work required. Duties of the chair/co-chairs include:
  - organize and lead regular meetings with recorded minutes and an agenda distributed in advance
  - manage the resulting work
  - encourage participation
  - ensure appropriate documentation is created and shared for the record
  - act as a liaison between employees, clients, and other stakeholders

**NOTE:** *Make sure to designate the note taker/“Recording Secretary” as a first order of business so you’re sure to have a good record of all that transpires in this meeting.*

- *Team Charter* – A Green Team Charter delineates its purpose, scope of activity, and expectations of its members. Much the same as your organization’s policy documents, the charter should be rooted in your mission and principles. While you can develop this document in advance, taking the time to discuss it as a group will help develop cohesion and improve buy-in. At a minimum, the charter should clearly address:
  - roles and responsibilities of team members and chair
  - the authority, time allocation, and budget given to the team before needing additional approval
  - to whom the green team reports

Ideally, the final draft should be approved by senior leadership in the same process used to establish formal working groups, teams, task forces, etc.

**NOTE:** *For small businesses a charter is not necessary, although the team should at least outline expectations and responsibilities.*

- *Initial Action Planning* – The team should then begin to get a sense of their next steps. Before jumping into a formal plan for the future, take stock of what's happening today. This



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is best done as an in-meeting brainstorming session bolstered by a collection of ideas in advance. Include in this discussion:

- Current initiatives and achievements
  - Established policies, programs, and activities
  - Available data to support green initiatives
- *Recommendations and focus areas* – As you develop the resulting comprehensive list of current initiatives and activities, you’ll begin to see gaps in performance and what work lies ahead. From this you should generate a list of questions and ideas, and then assign them to team members to research and report back at the next green team meeting.
  - *Next Steps* – Before closing this initial meeting of the team, make a commitment to a firm meeting schedule and set the date and time for the next meeting. This may seem like a silly step, but teams that don’t meet regularly fall apart quickly.

### **Keep the Process Going**

Forming a Green Team is just the beginning! To drive progress on your sustainability agenda, the Green Team needs to actively engage on a continual basis. Keys to success include:

1. After the Kick-off: While future meetings may become more relaxed with time, it is useful to circulate formal minutes. In particular, senior management needs to be kept apprised of your progress.
2. Work of the team: The first work of the Green Team is to develop your sustainability policies and begin to develop your Continuous Improvement Plan and Sustainability Metrics.
  - *Green Team Meetings* – Maintain regular meetings, at least twice a month, preferably weekly. This will help keep the work of the team on the daily “to do” list of participants and strengthen the relationships of members. Make sure to have a standard agenda with the expectation that members report progress on their areas of responsibility—even if little has transpired since the prior meeting.
  - *Training & Awareness* – One of the main jobs of the Green Team is to build a “deep green” culture that permeates the organization. Repeatedly talking about the issues will gradually help your management and staff buy-in to your actions. To ensure success, it is important to provide information through these four pathways:
    - Opportunities to collaborate with others around sustainability, such as joining the Team.
    - One-time themed events, such as brown-bag lunches or company outings (for example you might plant trees on Earth Day).
    - Friendly competitions such as “funniest mug day” give people the opportunity to be part of the winning team.



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- *Stakeholder Communication* – Create channels of communication with fellow staff members and other key stakeholders. Keeping them informed of your activities and reaching out for feedback will help bring others into the fold, and accelerate progress toward your goals. ([How to Build a Green Team: The First Step to Sustainability](#) has additional tips about internal and external communications.) Ideas for sharing your success include:
    - Produce a green newsletter or add a by-line in the company newsletter.
    - Put up notices on the bulletin board in the break room (You’ll find some great links to downloadable poster and flyer templates on Page 1 of the [DEP Certification Resources](#).)
    - After completing each round in your CIP, issue a press release highlighting your progress
    - Hold brown-bag lunches or organize special events, such as:
      - training programs
      - waste audits
      - office supply swaps
      - provide green drinks
      - organize green scavenger hunts
      - “pool parties” to connect for carpooling
      - electronic home gadget collection for recycling
  - *Gather Feedback* – Successful communications stream in two directions, so don’t just talk to your stakeholders—listen to them!
    - Annually survey your staff to solicit their ideas. Gathering this qualitative information will help you measure the success of some of your most vital programs.
    - Consider reaching out to other stakeholders such as customers and vendors to learn their needs and get ideas for how you can do better.
  - *Maintain Senior Leadership Support* – One of the all-too-common mistakes made by green teams is acting on ideas that ultimately get shot down by senior management.
3. Tips for success: The experience of other Green Teams who have gone before you has shown that you’re likely to succeed if you remember to:
- *Make sure to keep it fun!* – Remember that sustainability is about providing for human needs, which include enjoyment
  - *Budget Resources* – Be clear about the resources, time, budget, personnel, technology, etc. that will be needed to complete given initiatives.
  - *Make someone accountable* – Every action should be assigned to an individual who understands the scope of the assignment and agrees to the deadline.