

## Assembling a Green Team to Drive Waste Reduction Strategies



### What Is a Green Team?

A Green Team is a formal or informal group of individuals within an organization that meet regularly to design an ongoing action plan that seeks to educate staff about sustainability, share best practices, and create innovative solutions that meet the unique and diverse demands within the organization.<sup>1</sup> The members of a Green Team collaborate to identify the environmental effects of everyday workplace operations and work together to come up with alternative options that are just as effective yet have lower impacts. It can be as simple as observing an increase in the number of paper memos being used and thrown away in the office and suggesting the use of electronic memos or email messages as an alternative solution.

### More Than Just Recycling

Sustainable growth is an important component of having a successful and long-lasting business. There are many intricacies and individual nuances that go into making a business sustainable. The Green Team is more than just a

group of environmentally-conscious and eco-friendly coworkers; it is a team that supports the longevity and success of the business and designs action plans that directly benefit the business.<sup>2</sup> The Green Team can only work toward the goals of the business if employees at every level are included. Teams must be developed in a way that allows their functions and operations to transcend various sectors or units within the business.<sup>3</sup> The photo above shows members of the Green Team from historic Hotel Congress in Tucson, Arizona. The position or job title of every team member is written on the signs that each are holding. It is clear that this Green Team includes members from all levels of authority within the hotel.

### Why Is a Green Team Important for Hotels?

In the modern era of a growing globalized economy, consumers now have hundreds of options when it comes to the products and services they choose to buy. Research has shown that since the environmental movement began in the 1970s, consumers have begun to show signs of preferential interest toward environmentally-conscious

products and services.<sup>4</sup> In order to identify a sustainable product, consumers often seek out one of three things; environmental advertising, eco-labels, or eco-brands. Studies have pointed out that environmental advertising has the most profound impact when it comes to preemptively identifying purchasing behavior.<sup>4</sup>

Establishing a well-functioning Green Team within a hotel poses numerous opportunities for environmental advertising. The Green Team can oversee product purchasing for the hotel and seek out environmentally-friendly alternatives. Reducing the amount of waste generated at the hotel shows social and environmental responsibility and commitment to pollution prevention. Even reducing operational risk and handling reputation management effectively can be encompassed by the Green Team. Showcasing the different initiatives and pollution prevention tactics that the hotel is using can become a huge economic opportunity as consumers are becoming more conscious of the hotels with which they choose to do business.

The Green Team can work to coordinate events that support recycling on or near the hotel's property to advertise environmental stewardship as well as the hotel property itself. Hotels are great places for hosting a wide variety of events; as such, a Green Team can work with vendors to eliminate plastic waste and reduce the amount of waste generated overall. Installing a renewable energy project on-site can also prove to be a great way to showcase the hotel's environmental commitment. Installing a solar-covered parking lot is a great option that will also add to the comfort and convenience of your guests' stay. Prospective guests and green consumers will revel in the fact that part of their stay

at the hotel will be powered through renewable energy.

At the end of the day, the hotel must be profitable. A Green Team should add value to the hotel, not take it away. Compiling a team of employees that are both passionate about the environment and also invested in the longevity and success of the hotel will undoubtedly help to advance the hotel in its mission.

## Creating a Green Team

**Start Small:** Gather a core group of individuals within the hotel staff that show interest in sustainability, environmental awareness, or conservation. These individuals should also care about the hotel's operations and success.

**Establish Meetings:** Be sure to hold Green Team meetings on a regular basis, whether it be quarterly, monthly, every other month, or whatever works best for the group members. Consider hosting a year-end or year-beginning celebration that showcases the achievements of the year and presents an opportunity to set goals for the upcoming year.

**Break Borders:** Include members from different departments, sections, or units to ensure that the Green Team is addressing concerns across all operations of the hotel. For example, the head chef of the kitchen may have great food waste reduction strategies and the coordinator for children's activities may have ideas on planning sustainable projects and events. Don't miss out on valuable insight!

**Support Project Ownership:** Encourage the Green Team to brainstorm about priorities and overlapping interests. Suggest the development of subcommittees to work on certain projects or issues that can be easily addressed. Larger projects may take more time and may be more challenging, so start with the easiest ones first.

**Allocate Funds and Provide Tools:** As with any other organization, a Green Team needs time and resources to make effective changes. Ensure that funding for the Green Team is included in the hotel's budget planning process.

**Make it Fun:** Use fun or creative methods to foster a positive environment and support a Green Team that enjoys what they do. Make it a rewarding experience for all employees in order to encourage participation in green initiatives with incentives, contests, and recognition.



Even though sustainability works to address very serious concerns and real-world problems, there can still be a lot of fun along the way!

**Communicate:** Newsletters, blogs, forums, posters, and social media platforms are great ways to boost the Green Team's publicity and encourage people to get involved. Make it easy to access and easy to understand. For example, hanging event posters or flyers in bathroom stalls is a great method that can get the message across.

**Create Satellite Teams:** If the hotel is part of a larger network of hotels, consider establishing satellite teams at those locations so they, too, can design and implement sustainability solutions that address the problems that are unique to their operations.

**Show Appreciation:** Be sure to recognize the Green Team volunteers and members and show appreciation for the work they have done. Consider creating certificates for Green Team members or awards for accomplishments within the team.

## Easy Options for Source Reduction

A Green Team can oversee source reduction initiatives such as:

- Eliminate the use of individual plastic water bottles.
- Switch to refillable or reusable containers as opposed to single-use products.
- Purchase in bulk to reduce packaging waste and shipping costs.
- Make double-sided printing and copying the default setting on all computers and printers.
- Provide disposable items to guests only upon request.
- Use projectors and displays instead of paper copies in hotel meetings.

## Employee Incentive Ideas

The following ideas are great ideas to start with to increase participation in source reduction, waste diversion, and recycling in the hotel. This is not an exhaustive list of employee incentive or recognition programs.

- "Green Team" reserved parking spaces or a single reserved parking spot that rotates monthly for each month's Green Leader or Champion.
- Designing pins, awards, or certificates for achievements.
- Featured highlights section in the hotel newsletter that showcases ongoing projects and/or people.
- Host "team builder" activities such as a group outing, event or dinner to celebrate achievements.

## References

- <sup>1</sup> [Energy Star. Green Team Checklist.](#)
- <sup>2</sup> [Moxen, J., & Strachan, P. \(Eds.\). \(1998\). Managing green teams: environmental change in organisations and networks \(1st ed.\). Broom Hall: Greenleaf Publ.](#)
- <sup>3</sup> [GreenBiz. How to Build a Green Team: The First Step to Sustainability.](#)
- <sup>4</sup> [van Felius, N., de Vries, M., & Cavagnaro, E. Influencing guest behavior towards sustainable hotel choice by distribution channels.](#)
- <sup>5</sup> [Harvard University. 10 Tips for a Successful Green Team.](#)
- <sup>6</sup> [Green Meeting Industry Council. Forming a Green Team.](#)
- <sup>7</sup> [EPA. What Is a Green Team?](#)

## Additional Resources

- [GreenBiz. Vital to Business Survival: Reading the Signs of Change.](#)
- [GreenBiz. Vital to Business Survival: Assessing the Impact of Environmental Pressures.](#)
- [GreenBiz. How Companies Are Investing in Sustainability.](#)

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