

Environmentally Preferred Sourcing Program

EPS Toolkit: Setting up a green team

Implementing sustainable environmental programs requires participation from a wide variety of individuals. You need input from both senior leadership and front-line workers, as well as from a wide variety of departments.

Creating committees or teams can be done in many different ways. Green teams:

- Bring decision-makers and implementers together to make change happen
- Provide greater buy-in to changes in practices and products
- Make it easier to develop institutionwide goals and action plans
- Market the fact that your hospital is environmentally friendly
- Ensure development of initiatives that include all areas of the facility
- Show that the message is not top-down; members of the team will sell your hospital's departments and their employees on the importance of the projects
- Challenge current practice and promote innovative solutions

What you can do

The following are several suggestions, and you can find others in the sections on accessing internal and external help and communication.

Get the right representation

Ensure that you have the right mix of individuals on your green team. Include representatives from the following areas.

- Clinical areas, including surgical services (this department often produces the largest percentage of hospital waste)

- Environmental services (collection and disposal issues)
- Facility management (infrastructure for waste collection and transport)
- Purchasing (able to stop environmentally unfriendly products from entering the facility and replace them with environmentally friendly products)
- Food services (source reduction, recycling issues)
- Infection control (infectious waste handling issues, cleaning protocol, staff education support)
- Laboratory, including pathology, histology, clinical and research (hazardous waste issues)
- Medical records (confidentiality and recycling issues)
- Nursing (operational issues)
- Pharmacy (packaging, recycling, hazardous chemical issues)
- Safety (regulated medical and hazardous chemical waste handling, waste accumulation, employee safety issues)
- Education, or public affairs or marketing (to get positive media coverage in the community)

Include change agents

Include specific individuals who express concerns about or support for environmental efforts and who can function as effective change agents. Change agents are important to broaden the impact of your team.

Ensure that you have members with clout

You need members on your team who have the ability to make high-level decisions and have support from senior executives. For example, if a capital investment is required for a new waste management system, they can approve those expenditures.

Invite others on an as-needed basis

Invite other individuals or departments to attend meetings that involve their areas. For example, invite the payroll manager when you are working to introduce an office paper recycling program; and the head of radiology when you are working on chemical use.

Consider departmental green teams

Green teams can be created on a departmental level if it would be more efficient to implement specific action plans. For example, an O.R. green team might include representatives from anesthesia, surgical services, radiology or O.R. and work specifically on issues related to that area, or provide a representative to attend facilitywide green team meetings to ensure their needs are heard.

Set clear goals and objectives

Green teams are action and implementation teams: the individuals who determine how best to implement and maintain programs. You may want to establish terms of reference for the team with identified objectives, including the following.

- To develop, implement and communicate work practice changes that achieve environmentally friendly practices and outcomes
- To coordinate staff education on methods, strategies and action plans to specifically decrease medical waste in their departments and facilities, as well as recycle appropriate products and positively affect financial implications
- To monitor the program and initiate alternatives to existing practices that will positively affect the environment as well as financial ramifications to the hospital
- To collect, measure and report on environmental performance

Start with one or two projects

A green team can undertake many activities, from recycling and regulated medical waste reduction to energy and water conservation programs. The team needs to prioritize its activities based on existing problems or possible cost savings, or by choosing a project that many members of the team are interested in or passionate about.

Promote the green team activities for wider acceptance

Remember that communication and education is part of any project. You can promote the team and its activities through:

- Monthly articles in the staff newsletter, including green tips
- Including information at new employee orientation
- Creating an intranet presence
- Conducting green information days
- Making presentations to the board, senior management or in departmental meetings

Evaluate the team's effectiveness

You will want to regularly, at least annually, evaluate your progress by asking the following questions.

- Are we meeting our goals?
- Is our facility supportive of our actions? Does the team meet regularly?
- Are the meetings well attended?
- Is there sufficient carry through by team members?
- Are there others that should be involved with the team?

Prepare for barriers

Habits are hard to change, and staff may be resistant or even hostile to your efforts. Be patient and focus on incremental change. Know the facts. For example, it is a myth that greening costs more money. Make sure you are well-educated on all the savings and can clearly articulate the issue.

Internal and external help

You are not alone. Many people within and outside your organization can help you reach your green goals. Accessing help or information from others will broaden your understanding and ensure you realize how wide the environmental movement in health care already is.

What you can do

Challenge your employees

Many employees are far less green at work than they are at home, because they feel the organization's culture does not support them. Encourage and allow your employees to use their talents to come up with great ideas.

When employees can develop ownership of their goals, targets and milestones, they are more likely to accept the change. Be open to ideas brought to you, support from behind as much as possible and let your employees lead.

Work with other departments that have a vested interest in your project

Green-related projects offer many other benefits besides improving the environment. These can include waste reduction, improved staff safety, cost savings and increased environmental compliance. Team up with other areas that have a vested interest to get more support.

For example:

- Work with housekeeping to implement a microfiber mops project. In addition to lower water and chemical use, microfiber mops reduce shoulder and rotator cuff injuries. This is a benefit that your environmental manager and long-term disability coordinator will be interested in.
- Energy reduction saves money, which can be used for investments in other areas of the facility – a point facilities management will appreciate.

Work with Vizient and your vendors

Your vendors can provide you with information and assistance in your green efforts, as can Vizient™. All you have to do is ask.

Get involved in regional green teams

Work with other hospitals — perhaps through a quarterly or semiannual meeting — to exchange information and resources, successes, and collaborate on projects (for example, a rural hospital recycling initiative).

Regional teams provide an ideal opportunity to learn about specific topics in more detail, about upcoming products or services you may not know about, and to tour other facilities to see first-hand their projects' outcomes.

Access online education

Many resources are available on the internet. See the resources section for more information.

Attend conferences

Regional, state and national conferences on various sustainability issues are conducted often. They provide ideal education and networking opportunities.

Communication

Your project goals need the broad support of your colleagues. Getting a clear, concise and creative message out lets others know what you're passionate about and why it matters. Benefits of communication include:

- Increasing buy-in
- Recognition of the efforts of staff making an extra effort to be green
- Helps to get more people on board
- Increase overall awareness
- Provides a way to get good ideas to the right people

What you can do

Craft your message well

Communicate your issue in ways that reflect organizational goals and values. Meet people from where they are on issues instead of talking to them from your viewpoint.

Answer the questions:

- Why does it matter to me?
- Why should I care?
- What can I do?

- What's in it for me?
- Staff must understand the environmental effects of their actions – otherwise, why change?

Make it fun

Think about the emails you open and the marketing you remember. Creative messaging and presentation can go a long way in communicating your message.

Use the influence of others

Staff listen the most to their colleagues and their immediate supervisors. Use engaged and environmentally committed employees to drive change. Give them the power and opportunity to convince others.

Start an FMYI, or “for my innovation” platform

Utilize the ability to share and collaborate with your coworkers with this web-based intranet platform. It's easy to use and similar to SharePoint, but free and created specifically to help sustainability efforts succeed. Like MySpace, LinkedIn or other networking and collaboration sites, FMYI creates a shared workspace where you and your colleagues can generate and share ideas as well as keep up to date on progress on shared goals.

Model the behavior you want

Staff won't do what you don't do — you must model the behavior you want. Examples include:

- Recycling your paper
- Avoid printing emails
- Turn off your lights, monitor and computer (if allowed)
- Bring your meals in reusable containers
- Always use a reusable cup

Integrate issues into regular communications

Inserting a green tip into regular staff newsletters can help educate your peers and broaden support for your project.

Get competitive

Internally, recognize staff and departmental achievements and set up a competition. As an organization, apply for a Practice Greenhealth award, enter your project in Net Impact's Green Challenge, or apply for state or municipal awards. Harness the competitive spirit of your colleagues to build momentum around the cause.

Consider annual reporting

Producing an internal annual report on the efforts and progress of your environmental commitment can help legitimize your initiative – particularly to your senior management, board or shareholders.

Remember that your staff are members of the public

External publicity reaches internal staff. They read the news and listen to the radio. Use news releases and articles in the trade press to educate both the community and your staff about your activities. Applying for and winning awards is another way to publicize your success. Placing logos on your fleet (if you are purchasing hybrids or using biofuels) is another idea.

Recognize and reward

Use personal rewards like simple thank you cards or gift certificates. Larger rewards may include sending staff to environmental conferences such as CleanMed. You can also host environmentally responsible parties or group events.

The Vizient Environmentally Preferred Sourcing (EPS) Program offers members supply and service cost savings through more than 36,000 supplier agreements. EPS suppliers have verified EPS attributes and provide products that can support members' sustainability objectives. This toolkit is a resource to help members create or enhance their sustainability programs.

As the nation's largest member-driven health care performance improvement company, Vizient provides network-powered insights in the critical areas of clinical, operational, and supply chain performance and empowers members to deliver exceptional, cost-effective care.



To learn more, contact us at eps@vizientinc.com.