

Case Studies: Organizational Change for Sustainability

People can significantly impact the environmental performance of their organization. Many factors influence an organization's use of resources, and changing an organization to improve environmental performance can be daunting.

The FEMP Institutional Change Team provides expertise grounded in social science principles to help organizations make the change to sustainability.

The case studies presented in this series build on this expertise. The studies are:

- specific to the unique aspects of federal workplaces
- descriptive of real-world conditions
- examples of strategies for institutionalizing change

We encourage you to contact the team (through Jerry Dion at FEMP) to discuss possible applications of the case study material to your organization's specific needs.

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Summary

Use of "Lean Green" teams and a detailed guidebook helps develop a conservation culture throughout the USPS



Go Green Forever stamps illustrate the Postal Service's commitment to sustainability. *Image courtesy USPS.*

USPS - Lean Green Teams

The Postal Service's 630+ Lean Green Teams are made up of postal employees who collaborate across functions to identify and implement low- and no-cost ways to conserve natural resources, purchase fewer consumable products, and reduce waste of all kinds. Teams are organized at the area, district, and facility levels. The teams employ on-line tools including a Lean Green Team Guide, a Green Project List, and a Green Initiative Tracking Tool that tracks both leading indicators (status of project implementation) and lagging indicators (financial and environmental impacts).

The projects are in six areas: core projects (e.g., establish a team, evaluate current practices), energy reduction, vehicle petroleum use, recycling, consumables reduction, and water conservation. Each project includes a brief description and clear instructions on how to implement it, where to go for additional information, and definition of a "finish line" describing end results. A primary goal of the program is to build a conservation culture throughout the USPS by successfully implementing simple waste reduction initiatives. Examples of projects include:

- Shut off heating and cooling in unused areas
- Conduct a basic energy audit
- Educate employees on fuel-saving driving habits such as avoiding "jackrabbit starts"
- Review recycling contracts and change as needed to optimize benefits
- Buy green products
- Reduce irrigation water.

Outcomes

Lean Green Teams have helped the Postal Service reduce energy, water and petroleum-fuel use, and solid waste to landfills, helping the Postal Service save more than \$41 million in fiscal year (FY) 2011. Postal facilities also recycled more than 215,000 tons of material, which saved \$14 million in landfill fees and yielded \$24 million in new revenue.

Roles, Rules, and Tools

The program targets staff cross-functional teams rather than individuals; the idea is that, in their roles as building inhabitants, drivers, water and consumer product users, and waste disposers, staff can work together to create a conservation culture that results in energy and waste savings. Leadership support and use of improved green practices encourage staff to establish teams and implement activities that are in line with local needs and priorities. To encourage standardized implementation, a 30-minute on-line orientation is provided along with a standardized kick-off briefing for deployment at the area, district, and facility levels.

Social Science Principles Applied

- **Social Network & Communications**
- **Multiple Motivations**
- **Leadership**
- **Commitment**
- **Information & Feedback**
- **Infrastructure**
- **Social Empowerment**
- **Continuous Change**

Principles Applied

The USPS activities applied four social science principles: Leadership, Commitment, Information & Feedback, and Social Empowerment.

Leadership

Leadership from the Postmaster General is evident in public statements and a streamed video on the Lean Green Team home page and formation of teams is included as a strategic goal.

Commitment

In accordance with the Commitment Principle, teams sign up to do projects that have very specific goals and their progress can be tracked at every level.

Information & Feedback

Through email, a central database, and a dedicated website, the teams learn how other teams are doing.

Social Empowerment

Since the projects have been scoped to be doable with limited resources, teams know they can finish them.

Lessons Learned

When leadership and actionable information are lined up, an agency can create widespread enthusiasm. The development of software infrastructure (tracking systems, websites, written guidance, etc.) helps the program persist and, over time, will change the organizational culture (although broad cultural change cannot be claimed as yet).

Supporting Documentation

Shoaf, Dianne 2011. Lean Green Team Initiative. Presented to the Behavior, Energy, and Climate Change conference, November 1.

<http://www.greengov2011.org/presentations/Education/GreenGov-2011-Education-S4-DianeShoaf.pdf>

http://about.usps.com/news/national-releases/2012/pr12_031.htm

<http://about.usps.com/what-we-are-doing/green/welcome.htm>

Keywords

USPS, employee engagement, employee action, Lean Green Teams, leadership, commitment, social empowerment, information and feedback, soft infrastructure