

Secrets to a successful green team

By Lori Braunstein, Founder & Executive Director, Sustainable Cherry Hill

Forming a green team is a first step in establishing a community's participation in Sustainable Jersey, a certification program for municipalities that want to go green, save money, and take steps to sustain their quality of life over the long term. According to the Sustainable Jersey web site, green teams leverage the skills and expertise of team members to develop plans, implement programs, and assist with educational opportunities that support the creation of a sustainable community. They can be called by any name, but the role of the green team is the same: lead and coordinate the sustainability activities of the community.

What many people do not realize is that a successful green team must be built upon a foundation of strong leadership, clarity of purpose, strategic planning, communication and more. Through several years of working with Cherry Hill and the Green teams of many of my neighboring communities, I have identified 12 Secrets to a Successful Green team.

1. **Create a mission statement** - Everyone involved should have a clear sense of the purpose, roles and the responsibility of the group. A mission statement is best developed as a group exercise with input from diverse interests.
2. **Pick a strong leader** - The green team should have a clearly defined leader, whose role and responsibilities have been determined and documented. Having leaders from both the municipal and community sides of the team is particularly effective.
3. **Divide the work** - While strong leadership is vital to the success to your green team, it is helpful to assign other group members to tasks such as scheduling meetings, creating agendas, arranging rooms, sending out emails, taking minutes, updating spreadsheets, uploading documents, writing communications, etc. This helps decrease leader burnout and enables other group members to take ownership of their roles on the team.
4. **Make a plan and visit it often** - Achieving Sustainable Jersey certification can take several years. Having a strategic plan with long and short-term goals helps to keep the green team focused and moving forward. Revisit the plan at each meeting to keep on track.
5. **Schedule regular meetings** - Choose a regular meeting time and stick with it. Creating a yearly meeting schedule and communicating it to members can make the difference between a successful effort and one that gets "fit in" when convenient.
6. **Be clear about how decisions are made** - Meeting and decision making procedures should be clearly defined and understood by the group. Transparency can eliminate power struggles and hurt feelings.
7. **Think Diversity!** - Take an honest look at who is on your green team. Does it include representatives from municipal government, residents, businesses, faith groups, schools, etc.? Does the group reflect the overall demographic (race, income, age, etc.) of the town? The more diverse voices at the table, the more robust and authentic the effort will be.
8. **Get Municipal Support** - Sustainable Jersey is administered by the municipality, so your green team cannot succeed without implicit and explicit municipal support. Does the team have access to municipal staff or consultants in areas such as planning, engineering, legal matters,

purchasing? Be mindful of how partisanship might influence the decisions or progress of the group.

9. **Communicate...and then communicate some more!** - Regular, formal communications should go out to green team members, municipal leadership and the community. Keeping everyone informed helps the team celebrate progress and involves others in the process.
10. **Hone your community organizing skills** - It is vital for the community at large to be aware of and support the efforts of the Green team. Develop a community outreach plan that includes building email lists; sending out regular communications using all available media (digital/social /print, hosting); holding at least two education/outreach events per year and, eventually hosting a community visioning event.
11. **Don't do it all yourself!** - Most communities have existing initiatives, resources and programs that may count towards Sustainable Jersey certification. Having an environmental commission -- and many projects undertaken by commissions -- can earn points toward certification, such as creating an environmental resource inventory, open space plan or easement stewardship program. Does your town have a shade tree commission, an environmental club at the high school or a civic association that has a "Buy Local" program? Research, document and celebrate these efforts.
12. **Network, network, network** - Every community has groups like Rotary Clubs, PTA's, Swim Clubs and Civic Associations that have their own resources. Visit these groups, ask them to send out your information to their email lists, have a table at their events and look for every opportunity to connect with assets that already exist in your town.

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