

BUILDING A SUSTAINABILITY TEAM

MBoiled down, building buy-in in any situation is about showing value. Managing those political and interpersonal relationships to show how important sustainability is in a thriving, competitive city is intense. Sustainability Directors, it's time to borrow skills from salesmen, politicians, and marketers. Read on for some pointers in navigating these waters.

Below builds on the SSDN April 2015 Building Buy-in call:

Start Basic: [develop relationships with other department staff](#). Helping departments with projects unrelated to sustainability can demonstrate the value of your office. Write a grant application for them, crunch some numbers they need, volunteer to work an event they are hosting in the community. People want to help and listen to people who help and listen to them.

Repurpose your Green Team: create a Sustainability Performance Council. The council is made up of at least one employee from each participating city agency, and each department contributes to the overall sustainability metric (GHG, for example) for the city. They each have a stake in making the city sustainable. The performance of all departments influences the total score. No one wants to look like a slacker in front of the city administration, so they will own the process to make sure it's attainable. [101 for cross-departmental interactions here](#).

Be Efficient: identify and eliminate waste in city processes. This is just good use of tax dollars, right? Overcome individual fear of change by creating a platform called "I Want to be Innovative and Efficient, BUT..." The platform is a closed-door session where city staff have the opportunity to voice concerns. The Sustainability Director (most importantly) listens, and then offers tools for removing barriers to innovation / efficiency. [More on the concept of efficiency in governing, here](#).

Be Consistent: hold weekly meetings with the City Manager and one department. Through these regular meetings, which rotate through departments, the departments will realize that the Sustainability program is not just a short-lived fad but that efficiency and innovation are now a part of the city's culture. Over time, the departments will become engaged and proactive in the process. When departments understand that they aren't being threatened but invited, it's nice. But when they see that they can get points with the administration by playing, it's better. Don't have the administration's ear yet? [Basic boss navigation tips, here](#).

Be About Goals: be willing to be unpopular at times. It's not always about wooing, but at times about winning to move the needle. This is where you measure your political capital (be realistic), and take professional (read, polite but firm) steps to press an agenda that is necessary to meet stated goals. Don't do it alone. Find another (preferably internal) proponent who is willing to make the strong case with you. Pick one from all those relationships you've built.

BOTTOM LINE:

Know your own worth and the importance of what you are doing. If you can't explain the value of your office to yourself in dollars and common sense, you'll have trouble quantifying it to others in those terms – and efficiency (economics), health (environment), and quality of life (equity) is a good sell in almost every town.