Green Team Guide: Strategies for Success

What is a Green Team?
A Green Team is a group of school community members who work together on sustainability projects and educational strategies. Green Team members may include students, teachers, custodians, administrators, and parent or community volunteers.

Green Teams in schools participating in the King County Green Schools Program are eligible to receive assistance, Green Team workshops, and materials from a program representative.

For more information, visit www.kingcounty.gov/GreenSchools.

Strategies for success
Successful teams often follow an ongoing three-step process of recruit, sustain, and reward.

Recruit

Recruit adults. Include a minimum of two school staff members, such as teachers, administrators, or custodians. Adult Green Team members provide valuable leadership and serve as primary contacts for King County Green Schools Program support.
  
  - It is helpful to include a member of the custodial staff. Custodians collect garbage, monitor heating systems, and are familiar with all parts of the building.
  - Parent volunteers are welcome to participate.

Recruit students. There is no such thing as too large a Green Team! Large teams may be divided into sub-committees such as a recycling team, an energy conservation patrol, a water conservation and pollution prevention team, a school garden stewardship group, and more.

Below are strategies to increase student membership or participation.

  - Promote. Use fliers or posters, and morning, lunch and assembly announcements.
  - Ask an existing club to include Green Team activities or responsibilities. Green Team activities are a great fit for science, environmental, and community service (including ASB) clubs.
• **Consider designating a specific grade level as the Green Team.** Graduating students can train incoming students in their responsibilities a few months prior to the end of each school year.

• **Use a formal application process.** A student Green Team application form and pledge asks students to commit to serving on the team and communicates clear expectations about student participation.

Although having a large number of students involved in a Green Team is helpful, please keep in mind that, as Steve Jobs said, “A small team of A+ players can run circles around a giant team of B and C players.”

**Sustain**

Regular meetings and realistic activities are the best ways to sustain Green Team enthusiasm. Here are tips toward maintaining student motivation and team visibility at your school.

- Meet regularly (once per week or once every other week is recommended)
- Keep project goals achievable. For most schools, it works well to plan one small project (or one activity or step toward a larger project) per month.
- Share each success or project completion with the school community.
- If more than one team or class is engaged in conservation practices and education, compile a calendar or list of all the activities – and share it with the school. A formal calendar or list that captures who is doing what and when will help your school sustain the activities even when staff and student leaders change.

**Project or activity ideas**

**Daily projects**

- Monitor lunch recycling and waste disposal stations.
  - When Green Team members monitor recycling and waste disposal stations during lunch, their fellow students learn how to properly sort materials.
  - Assigning two student monitors to each recycling and waste station may increase participation in recycling.
  - Consider rotating the monitoring responsibility between students, classes, or grade levels.
  - Monitoring can be handled by a science or community service class, and can be used as a graded or bonus project for a class -- or for community service credit.
  - Consider creating a short video to share with other students on how to sign up to monitor, what to do when monitoring, and how to get credit for the time.
  - Survey cafeteria recycling bins for contamination and share results with students. Team members can examine recycling bin contents to identify contamination (such as liquids and straws), and then create an announcement (or other types of communication) to educate the school community about how to reduce waste and improve recycling.
• Check classrooms to make sure lights are turned off in unoccupied rooms and that other energy conservation practices are routinely followed. Use the energy conservation classroom checklist.

Weekly or monthly projects

• Organize a waste free lunch day.
  o For tips, visit http://www.wastefreelunches.org/HowTo.html.
  o Waste volume can be tracked by lunch period, class, or grade level to encourage positive competition to reduce lunch waste.

• Host a school supply swap day. See the step by step guide.

• Check classrooms to make sure lights are turned off in unoccupied rooms and other energy conservation practices are routinely followed. Use the energy conservation classroom checklist.

• Make weekly or monthly announcements over the PA system, in the cafeteria, at assemblies, in newsletters, on bulletin boards, etc. about waste reduction, recycling, energy conservation, water conservation, and other conservation practices. Use the Communication Guide for tips on how to promote conservation. To educate the school community, add facts about recycling and other conservation practices to each announcement.

Semi-annual or annual projects

• Complete a campaign to improve your school’s sustainability practices. See sample campaigns and guides for secondary schools.

• Organize an Earth Day (or Earth Week) celebration. See Earth Day Activity Guide.

• Conduct assessments of waste, energy or water use, or modes of transportation to and from school.
  o Have students use science and math literacy skills to determine how much waste is being generated by the whole school or in the cafeteria, and what percentage is being sorted into recycling and food scrap bins. Have students use communication skills by giving kudos for correct sorting and reduced waste, and by providing guidance on improvements. King County can provide Tash on a Tarp supplies and guidance.
  o Conduct an energy or water assessment. Use the King County Green Schools Program Level Two (energy conservation) Best Practices Guide or the Level Three (water conservation) Best Practices Guide as a tool for the assessment.
Conduct an assessment of how students and staff are getting to and from school. Use the King County Green Schools Program Transportation Best Practices Guide.

Broadcast the results to the school community via the school website, parent newsletter, staff meeting presentation, or assembly or lunch announcement.

King County school education and Green Team resources

- Elementary school green team resources
- Secondary School green team resources
- Remind teachers to sign up for King County’s classroom workshops and other free educational programs: Elementary school resources / Secondary school resources.

Sample Green Team meeting agendas

Meetings to build excitement and establish expectations

- Use your first meeting to discuss expectations for each student.
- Consider asking students to complete an application or pledge form to communicate expectations and build commitment.
- Teams may choose to brainstorm their own list of team norms, expectations, and goals.
- To build team identity, complete an activity such as selecting or creating a team name, logo, or slogan. This branding can be used on buttons, stickers, and education materials.
- Develop a list of desired projects for the year, and decide which projects will be priorities.
- Create a calendar of team activities or projects, keeping in mind to complete one activity small project (or one step toward a larger project) each month.

Meetings to build awareness and increase knowledgeable about waste reduction, recycling, energy and water conservation, or other conservation practices

- Train students by sorting items commonly found in school recycling, trash, and compostable material containers. Ask your Green Schools Program representative to provide a training for your team.
- Use items collected from school trash and recycling containers to make 3-dimensional recycling and waste disposal posters to place above cafeteria garbage and recycling containers.
- Create posters (such as the three-dimensional posters mentioned above and shown to the right) to help students and staff to properly sort recyclable materials and trash, and to remind the school community to conserve energy and water.
- Create a skit or video to expand knowledge and to encourage conservation behaviors.
Meeting to examine school waste
- Check with administrators, custodians, and teachers before completing this activity. Explain that students will examine school recycling and trash practices in order to track and encourage school-wide waste reduction and recycling.
- Ask student teams to complete a "scavenger hunt" in each classroom, office, and hallway. Scavenger questions may include the following.
  - How many recycling and garbage containers are in each room?
  - Where are they located? Is each garbage container paired with a recycling container that is placed next to it?
  - On or above each recycling container, is there list of what belongs in the recycling container? Note the number of recycling signs needed in each room.
  - What items are in each recycling and garbage container?
  - Does each classroom and office space have a reuse box for paper that’s only used on one-side? If yes, where is it located?
  - Review scavenger hunt data to identify areas for improvement in school recycling and waste reduction practices.
  - Broadcast results and encourage every member of the school community to practice simple everyday actions to reduce waste, recycle, and engage in other conservation practices.
  - Contact your Green Schools Program representative to request recycling signs or containers, and energy and water conservation signs.

Meeting to plan an all-school recycling kick-off
- Plan a recycling kick-off event to educate students and staff about waste reduction and recycling and to promote any new or improved practices.
- For more guidance, refer to the recycling kick-off event guide.

Meeting to plan a student-led staff meeting presentation
- Since staff members play a key role in ensuring long-term recycling success, educate staff on what can and can’t be recycled at school. Having Green Team students plan and present at a staff meeting provides team members with a sense of empowerment, and staff members listen!
  - Establish roles for students. Practice the presentation so students feel comfortable.
  - Refer to "How to present about Waste Reduction and Recycling" guide for ideas.

Meeting to make one-sided paper reuse trays to reduce school paper waste
- Make visually consistent G.O.O.S. (Good on One Side) paper reuse trays to distribute to classrooms, offices, and the school library.
- Get permission from each teacher or office manager before placing a box in their space.
- Make G.O.O.S. boxes using empty printer paper box lids and a visually consistent label or logo. Ask your Green Schools Program representative for a copy of the “G.O.O.S.” image.
**Reward**

Celebrate successes as a team and as a school!

Green Team members work hard and deserve to be acknowledged for their efforts and successes. Positive reinforcement encourages existing members to stay on the team and also draws others to join.

Teams that complete projects are eligible to receive recognition and prizes. See the following web pages for more information about King County resources for student Green Teams.
- Elementary school green team resources
- Secondary School green team resources

Below are other types of rewards and celebrations.
- Recognize the team and its successes at a school assembly, a school staff meeting, and a school district board meeting.
- Recognize the team and its successes in a school or district newsletter, an online bulletin, a hallway bulletin board, or school website.
- Provide certificates of recognition. Find printable templates online.
- Provide team members with additional recess or free time.
- Show a movie or plan a special activity of the team's choosing during lunch or after school.
- Have a party with fun and healthy snacks. Remember to use durable plates, bowls and utensils to support the Green Team's mission.

**Recap: Successful School Green Teams**

Your school can have an engaged and active student Green Team by
- Regularly recruiting team members.
- Setting realistic goals.
- Sustaining the team with regular meetings and a variety of activities.
- Sharing with the school community the results of the team’s activities and the school’s conservation successes, along with a list or calendar of ongoing actions for the following year.
- Rewarding team members with praise and recognition.
- Receiving assistance from the King County Green Schools Program.

**Ask for help from the King County Green Schools Program.** Contact your Green Schools Program representative or the program manager Dale Alekel at dale.alekel@kingcounty.gov or 206-477-5267.