The National Summit of Green Business Engagement Programs

Empowering Businesses Toward a Sustainable Future

Summit Leads to Collaboration and Ongoing Engagement

Summit attendees expressed an interest in further efforts to strengthen the coordination and impact of their programs. They agreed that increased national collaboration and support on issues such as energy benchmarking, standardized metrics, funding, best-practice sharing, and education could increase the success of business engagement programs and lead to a greater overall impact.

A small planning taskforce was established to carry out this ongoing work. This group has regular calls to discuss important follow-up topics including:

1. Building relationships between programs—Including meet and greets, a comprehensive directory of current programs and relevant contact information, and networking opportunities.

2. Sharing information across programs—Enabling independent programs to learn from each other through a variety of activities such as online tools and data collection, in-person summits and workshops, and web-based peer-to-peer learning opportunities and trainings.

3. Working at a national scale—Bringing together independent programs to demonstrate their collective impact, develop nationally agreed upon metrics, apply for shared funding, and engage in national policy conversations.

National coordination will enable best practices sharing and knowledge management that will increase the success and effectiveness of each program. A national network of partners could also coordinate strategies to target specific business engagement community to make greater strides and deeper savings in the coming years.

FEATURING PROGRAM

Awarding and Communicating Success

Chula Vista Business Challenge

The Chula Vista Business Challenge employs a low-cost outreach strategy to ensure that members of its Green Business Network are widely recognized within the community for their sustainability efforts. By partnering with local public access channels and high schools, the Chula Vista Business Challenge has created and shared high-quality profiles of their program participants with a broad audience. The program has used social media competitions as a low-cost, high-impact medium to engage program participants.

After Chula Vista’s presentation at the summit, attendees discussed the importance of rewarding success as an important incentive for program participants. Attendees also discussed awards programs. Due to budget constraints, many programs partner with existing city-wide award programs to gain visibility for their engagement efforts. Others encourage program participants to invite other local companies, and try to engage the wider community with invitations to the awards ceremonies. Chula Vista has been a leader in this area and has worked with local television stations to develop and air 12 video profiles of local businesses through its TV partnership.

Endnotes

1 www.abettercity.org/environment/event_National_Summit_Green_Business_Engagement_Programs.html

2 This equates to 21,500 tons of CO2 equivalent emissions.
Summit participants discuss approaches to benchmarking and data collection in each program.

Program Funding
Green business engagement programs have a variety of funding structures including utility funding, membership fees, public financing, and foundation or sponsorship support. Summit participants reviewed different funding mechanisms and explored ways to address funding barriers that limit the scope of what engagement programs are able to accomplish.

Performance Metrics
The importance of tracking performance metrics and successfully managing data were key topics of interest for summit attendees. Participants discussed different approaches they use to track metrics as well as the benefits of utilizing building performance benchmarking to demonstrate the program impacts. There was a shared desire to aggregate data across programs in order to understand progress toward regional and national resource reduction goals.

Program Evaluation
Participants evaluate their programs in order to identify business needs, investment returns, program impacts, progress towards milestones, and compliance rates. Data is also used as a marketing tool to increase participation. Participants discussed the pros and cons of absolute and relative metrics, as well as the idea of standardizing metrics across programs.

Utility Engagement
Utility energy efficiency initiatives play a role in all of the programs that attended the summit, but the level of utility involvement varied dramatically across the country. Participants discussed the benefits engagement programs can provide utilities through direct marketing and technical assistance. Summit participants also discussed potential challenges related to working with utilities including cultural differences and allocating credit for energy savings.

One major conclusion of the summit was that constant and effective program coupling with a range of technical resources enables participating businesses to learn the latest sustainability best practices. Building a strong peer network of professionals through programming with participating businesses has been a key success factor for many programs. These peer networks allow program participants to share knowledge and collaborative discuss the most effective ways to achieve common sustainability goals.

A critical element of many successful business engagement programs is support for workplace sustainability champions who lead behavior change initiatives within their companies. Recognizing these individuals and participating organizations with awards and positive media help build enthusiasm and support for these efforts.