

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



Summit participants discuss benefits of business participation in sustainability programs.

FEATURED 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.

metrics and interface with national organizations. As local governments set their sustainability and emissions goals for 2020 and beyond, business engagement programs are poised to play a unique and crucial role in galvanizing action in the commercial and industrial sectors. Continued support for this evolving and growing national collaboration will enable the green

business engagement community to make greater strides and deeper savings in the coming years.

END NOTES

- www.abettercity.org/environment/event_National_Summit_Green_Business_Engagement_Programs.html
- This equates to 21,500 tons of CO₂ equivalent emissions.



The National Summit of Green Business Engagement Programs

Empowering Businesses Toward a Sustainable Future



A Better City

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Introduction

Cities across the country are increasingly looking to the private sector to help them achieve their climate goals. “**Successful environmental engagement is composed of three critical elements: civic, philanthropic and private-sector leadership,**” said Brian Swett, Chief of Environment and Energy for the City of Boston, as he addressed the inaugural National Summit on Green Business Engagement Programs. In response to this challenge, green business engagement programs have been developed to provide leadership, guidance, and technical assistance to businesses and property owners in a number of major U.S. cities. These programs, which empower the private sector to reduce energy use

and adopt sustainable practices, are a valuable tool for local governments in their efforts to mitigate global warming. With 45 percent of U.S. greenhouse gas emissions originating from commercial or industrial buildings, comprehensive and successful green business engagement programs can have a substantial impact on global warming pollution nationally.

Many cities across the country have adopted aggressive near-term greenhouse gas emission goals, with several major U.S. cities adopting reduction targets of 25 percent or more within the next decade. Given this, there is an immediate need for significant and sustained energy reduction efforts in the private sector, and local governments are increasingly empow-

ering green business engagement programs to help them achieve their climate goals. With these factors in mind, the first National Summit of Green Business Engagement Programs was held in Boston in May of 2013.

Hosted by A Better City (ABC), a business-based non-profit that improves the economic competitiveness of the Boston region by advancing significant transportation, land development, and environmental policies, projects, and initiatives, the summit brought together more than forty leaders from business engagement programs across the nation. This group collectively represented more than 2,000 businesses and buildings ranging from small local enterprises to large multinational corporations.

Summit Highlights

The summit provided a forum for leaders to share achievements, discuss challenges, and exchange best practices for engaging the business community. Other important discussion topics included partnering with local governments, collaborating with utility districts, and developing methods for delivering program services. During the summit, participants identified a number of critical factors green business programs can focus on to support economically vibrant, sustainable cities where current and future generations will want to live, work, and play. The review of some of these ideas follow.

FEATURED PROGRAM

Bringing Dynamic Data to Business A Better City’s Challenge for Sustainability

A Better City accomplishes its mission by directly engaging with business and building leaders throughout the Boston region. ABC’s Challenge for Sustainability provides benchmarking and technical assistance and facilitates the development of tailored sustainability action plans. The Challenge for Sustainability works with **more than 100 facilities representing over 28 million square feet** of building space. The program has achieved **an average of 4.5 percent reduction in energy use** across its participant portfolio over the past several years. ABC helps program participants reach their goals by helping building managers and property owners manage their utility data and by developing company-specific recommendations based on this information. An online data management platform also makes it possible for Challenge participants to track progress towards their sustainability goals.



Summit participants discuss approaches to benchmarking and data collection in each program.



Yalmaz Siddiqui, Senior Director, Environmental Strategy, Office Depot

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 the 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,



Amy Harker, Specialist, Class 5 Energy, White Bear Lake, Minnesota

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.

Programming

One major conclusion of the summit was that constant and effective programming coupled 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 collaboratively discuss the most effective ways to achieve common sustainability goals.

Behavior Change & Recognition

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 helps build enthusiasm and support for these efforts.

More details on the conference, participants and proceedings can be found on ABC’s website.¹

FEATURED PROGRAM

A District Approach Seattle 2030 District

Seattle 2030 District is a non-profit organization which partners with Kings County, the City of Seattle, and local building owners and managers to achieve environmental performance targets in a high-density Seattle district. To date, the Seattle 2030 District **has enrolled 36 million square feet of space in the program**. Participants collect and share data on energy, water, and carbon dioxide emissions. The program’s goal is to achieve a ten percent reduction in resource consumption by 2015 and a fifty percent reduction by 2030. Participants commit to undertaking major audits or retrofits to achieve the program’s targets.

The District’s successful “Assess, Target, Deliver” initiative enables building owners to see how their buildings’ efficiency compares with their competitors and peers. Case studies are used to demonstrate to new and prospective members how other program participants are achieving their 2015 and 2030 goals. The District also maintains an online public dashboard where community members and participants can view progress toward the overarching district targets.