

Montgomery County Green Business Certification Program





History

- Program is modeled after the successful Bay Area Green Business Program in California and also draws on programs in Santa Monica, Sacramento and Sarasota.
- Initially we began to discuss the idea of a County program with representatives from the business community over two years ago.
- Eventually, developed a partnership with the County's Chamber of Commerce – very important in developing momentum, ownership, and support.



History

- Interviewed managers of the four programs and reviewed their checklists.
- We then selected actions from those checklists and combined them with our own programs, ideas and priorities.
- We reached out to our Department of Transportation and Division of Solid Waste and learned a great deal.



History

- List of actions ultimately grew to 260.
- Laid out a draft well over a year ago for stakeholder feedback – Chamber and DEP convened representatives.
- Continued to hone the document through on-going stakeholder input.
- Identified about 40 beta testers to review the draft application and provide feedback regarding the onsite verification process.



History

- Primary feedback from stakeholders was the following:
 - There should be two applications, one for tenants and one for owner occupiers
 - The bar should be set differently for small and large businesses
 - Businesses need information resources that will facilitate quick implementation of actions
 - Provide easy to use performance measurement tools so that businesses can monitor and be motivated by their success



Program Overview

- Voluntary
- Initial focus on office/retail
- Modest fee for certification -- \$250 for Large (25+ FTEs) and \$100 for Small (less than 25)
- Re-certification every two years
- Certification by individual facility
- Higher number of requirements for large businesses as well as owner-occupiers (as opposed to tenants)



Program Overview

- On site verification using outside consultants (3rd party)
- Very extensive resource guide that can be accessed by clicking on each action within the application. Divided accordingly:
 - Tips, Templates and Clarification
 - For More Information
 - Financial Incentives
 - Verification Requirements
- Developing database to capture information from application submissions.



Program Overview

Seven Categories of actions in the checklist:

- General
- Waste Reduction & Recycling
- Environmentally Responsible Purchasing
- Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy
- Efficient Runoff Management and Water Use
- Pollution Prevention
- Transportation and Travel



Program Overview

- Want to ensure that a company is taking a comprehensive and results-oriented approach to sustainability. Hence, each section is also divided into:
 - Policy
 - Actions and programs
 - Performance Measurement
- There are required actions – supporting policy, foundational actions, those required by law and performance measurement, -- and a specified number of additional actions within each section.
- “Other” option for innovative actions not listed.
- To get certified, businesses must implement between 70 and 120 actions depending upon their size and type.



Program Overview

- General consensus from the business community has been that “more (actions) is merrier” as it provides more choice and ideas.
- Feeling that certification is somewhat of a stretch, but within reach with a bit of dedication and time.
- Tenants should get credit for convincing their landlord/property manager to implement actions beyond the control of the tenant.



Program Overview

- Certified businesses will be listed in a Green Business Directory and receive a window decal, certificate and have access to the program logo (for stationary, web presence, etc).
- Website will feature case studies of certified businesses.
- Montgomery College to offer courses to help businesses get certified.



Program Development Issues

- Should the actions be weighted based on their environmental impact?
- Should there be different tiers of certification (e.g., bronze, silver, gold)?
- Should there be required performance based benchmarks?
- Does checking “yes” on an action in the application mean 100% compliance?
- What if a business’ N/A responses disproportionately limit their actions?



Program Implementation Issues

- Program budget is \$25,000, mostly for verification.
- Don't know how long funds will last and we're concerned about going to a waiting list in the first or second year.
- Our mantra has been "We'll make this work one way or another."



Program Implementation Issues

- Depending on demand, we might have to limit the amount of time spent during verification.
- We're considering engaging Montgomery College workforce development students to defray costs of verification and help build the green economy.
- Program theme of “continuous improvement,” but what happens if we find out that too few businesses are pursuing certification?



Opportunities and Momentum

- Cascading effect:
- Considering sustainability forums to engage the business community on key environmental issues.
- Useful tool to help green County Government operations and build friendly competition among departments and agencies.
- Green Economy Task Force
- Residential Green Living Guide