

The GreenGov Challenge: Turning Ideas into Action

Article provided by Council on Environmental Quality, Office of the Federal Environmental Executive, Christopher Currens, Deputy Associate Director for Green Technology (ccurrens@ceq.eop.gov)

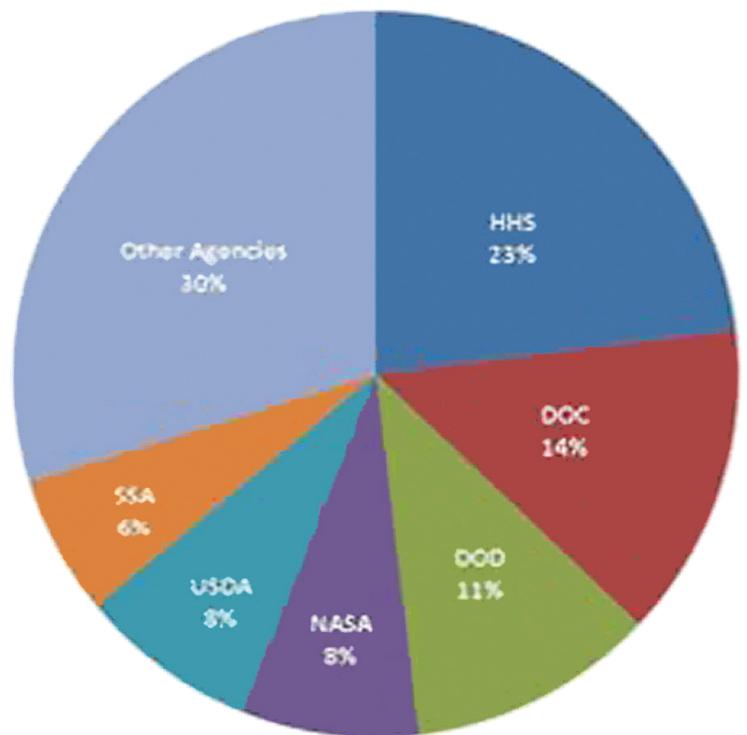
Demonstrating a commitment to lead by example, President Obama signed Executive Order 13514 (Federal Leadership in Environmental, Energy, and Economic Performance) on October 5, 2009, that sets sustainability goals for Federal agencies and focuses on making improvements in their environmental, energy and economic performance.

The President then asked all Federal and military personnel to join in the GreenGov Challenge to share their ideas on how we can lead by example, green the government, and meet the goals of the Executive Order on Federal Sustainability.

The GreenGov Challenge generated more than 5,000 ideas and 165,000 votes from 14,000 federal employees. The top ideas are summarized in the GreenGov Final Report, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/20100217-greengov-final-report.pdf>.

Among the most popular ones were expanding teleworking, landscaping with native plants that require less watering, making use of digital signatures to reduce printing documents, replacing non-recyclable materials with biobased cups and other service items in federal cafeterias, and installing solar panels of federal buildings.

In February (of 2010), President Obama issued a new challenge to Federal and military personnel to put their GreenGov ideas to work. The GreenGov Collaborative, www.fedcenter.gov/joingreengov, >>>



Previous page: Distribution of Ideas by Agency

This page, left: Distribution of Ideas by Region

>>> is an online community that brings together colleagues across the government to share strategies, ask questions, and create “green teams” to put their ideas into action. In a few short months, this community has grown to nearly 1000 members.

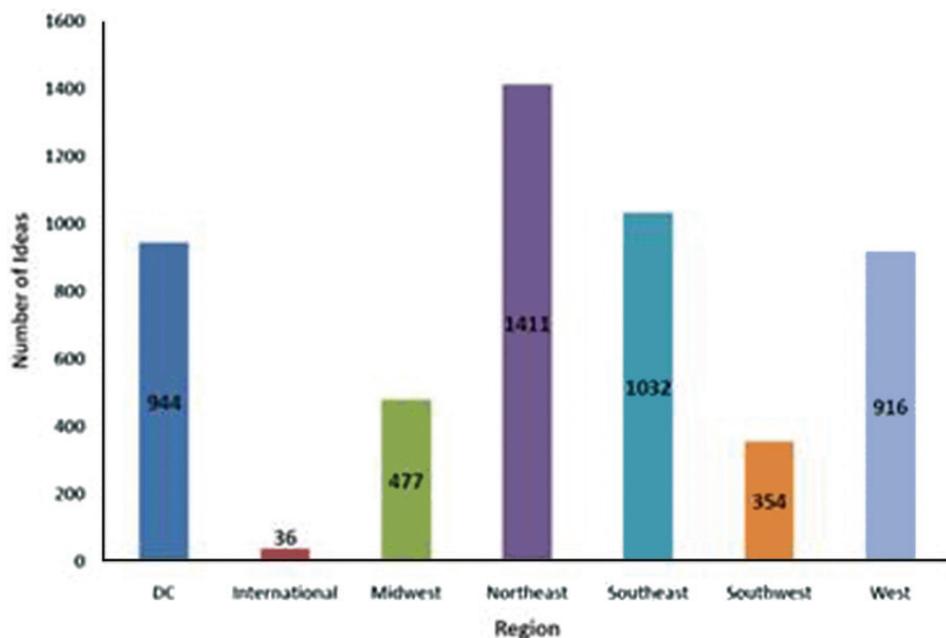
GreenGov Challenge Results

The results of these efforts have demonstrated that the federal community is willing to lead by example through transforming how they work in practical ways that have real results. Many of the ideas that were submitted—like eliminating cafeteria items that can’t be recycled or composted—can be implemented immediately. Others—like installing motion sensors to lighting systems and retrofitting bathrooms to conserve water—will take resources and planning over the longer term. Taken as a whole, the results of the GreenGov Challenge help to illuminate a commitment from across the federal government that operations will be more sustainable, responsible, and efficient.

What Was Heard by Topic Area

Conserving Energy

More ideas were submitted in the Conserving Energy category than any other in the GreenGov Challenge. Overwhelmingly, the federal community wants to eliminate what they see as wasteful energy use, whether it’s leveraging technology to reduce travel and commutes or using “smarter” lighting systems that turn off when spaces are empty. Over 120 ideas in the Conserving Energy category and more than



320 of all the ideas cited flexible working arrangements as an area the federal government should invest in to reduce energy consumption. Over 300 of the ideas submitted in the Conserving Energy category and more than 500 of all the ideas addressed motion sensors and lighting improvements. Additionally, many ideas suggested individual actions. For example, “Phil from DC”^{*} suggested that the government hold all meetings at the site which requires the fewest number of people to travel, and hold more meetings via tele- and/or video-conference to reduce emissions and costs.

Conserving Water

Nearly 100 ideas touched on the installation of high-efficiency, low-flow toilets and fixtures or motion-activated sensors in restrooms to conserve water. Others noted that employees can make an impact by changing habits, like remembering to shut off the faucets after use and encouraging people not to flush an empty toilet prior to using it. Federal and military personnel also see room for improvement in the landscape and structure of federal buildings. More than 80 submissions asked the federal government to reconsider its

irrigation practices and look at more sustainable landscaping options around federal buildings. Many of the submissions called for the use of native plants in landscaping practices as well as finding ways to utilize empty roof space to collect water for use as an irrigation supply. “Kristy from Colorado” suggested using a new irrigation standard for the selection of plants used at federal facilities: she thinks that if a plant needs to be watered by humans more than once week, it doesn’t belong there.

Eliminating Waste

According to the results of the GreenGov Challenge, federal employees are ready and willing to transition to a more electronic way of doing business. Two hundred ideas were submitted during the GreenGov Challenge related to improving e-business throughout the government, including encouraging all agencies to use electronic systems for submitting, signing, and tracking standard business forms. An employee from Huntsville, AL, suggested changing office culture to discourage printing hardcopies of all internal communications by giving recipients the offer to print >>>

>>> only if needed. Nearly 100 ideas submitted in the Eliminating Waste Category, and more than 170 overall, related to getting rid of Styrofoam and making our cafeterias more sustainable. Federal cafeterias can make some small changes that would offer big benefits. Simple solutions submitted to the GreenGov Challenge included eliminating plastic water bottles for purchase from cafeterias.

Reducing Carbon Emissions

Many of the ideas submitted in the GreenGov Challenge applied to multiple categories, particularly in the area of reducing carbon emissions. Employees identified with greening their commutes, particularly by making bike commuting a viable and attractive option for federal employees. Programs which provide incentives to cyclists, like offering benefits for bike commuting similar to existing transit benefits for parking and public transit—as well as offering lockers and shower facilities—were of special interest. “Joan R. from Bethesda” encouraged all of her fellow employees to make one change a week like biking or walking to work to do our individual part to reduce carbon emissions.

Sustainable Buildings

The “greening” of federal buildings generated many ideas, from improvements in building design, to reducing wasted energy with audits and smarter systems, to promoting teleworking as a way to reduce the amount of office space the government owns and maintains. Looking for ways to use renewable energy to power offices was a highlight, with hundreds of submissions calling for solar and wind energy projects on federal

buildings. Small changes in how employees use office spaces were also suggested. “Karen from Winedale (WY)” suggested using a more “natural” system of climate control by opening windows when possible to moderate temperature changes instead of cranking up the air conditioning. From Riverdale, MD, “Andrew” suggested that buildings and offices provide maps of which lights are operated by which switches to encourage people to turn off lights that don’t need to be on (without leaving anyone to work in the dark).

Sustainable Products and Purchasing

Federal employees definitely see room for improvement in products and purchasing, particularly regarding paper products. More than 500 ideas targeted overuse of paper. Nearly 100 of those ideas were in the sustainable purchasing category, where employees suggested more recycled content and less bleach used in paper products for the office and the restrooms. “CR from DC” suggested that each office create a ‘Freecycle’ system to help reuse and recycle unwanted products (both from work and home) within each agency campus to reduce waste. The project’s goal is to redistribute existing supplies to meet the needs of employees rather than purchasing new products. Many ideas were inspired by the desire for more transparency about the products they use every day. “David J. in Seattle” submitted an idea to create a label, similar to the EnergyStar program, which allows you to see the environmental benefit of using that product. He highlighted this system as one that all employees could easily understand and incorporate into their decision-making without previous training or back-ground knowledge of the system ¶

***Note—employee names included with suggestions above are abbreviated for this article**

The Office of the Federal Environmental Executive is ... responsible for promoting sustainability and environmental stewardship throughout Federal government operations. Created by Executive Order in 1993, the Office is housed at the President’s Council on Environmental Quality, is administered by EPA, and stewards the interagency Steering Committee on Federal Sustainability. For more information, visit: www.ofee.gov