

Chapter 1

Building a Green Team

The most important thing to do when developing or evaluating an environmental management program is to embrace learning and organize the order of action early and often by involving experts and local stakeholders as early as possible in the process. This is best accomplished by establishing an **environmental committee** or **“green team”** for your operation as your first priority. This first step will allow you to maximize the collaboration aspect of your environmental program. Through collaboration you will generate ideas and synergy that you could never accomplish on your own. The flow of the environmental management planning process should start with you and then go to your green team, then to your staff and other stakeholders to identify programs that will in turn lead to projects. This process is often referred to as the **four P’s of environmental stewardship**. They are **People, Planning, Programs,** and **Projects** in that order. Using the four P’s can keep you focused during the early stages of developing your environmental management program and help you gather valuable resources from each area.

How to Establish an Environmental Committee

The first order of business when establishing your environmental committee is to choose a chairman. If you are the senior green industry professional or driving force for environmental excellence at your operation, congratulations; you have just selected yourself as chairman! After all, you are the best and most logical choice to be chairman. You are the local expert, and as the person of contact, you will be the center of this group. Do not let any lack of title, credentials, or accolades be a deterrent to assuming the role as chairman and recruiter for your environmental committee.

At this moment you are a committee of one, and some important questions will naturally arise. Some of these questions include the following.

How many people will serve on your environmental committee? What skills and experience should they have? Are there any political issues that will affect the committee and its work? How often will the committee meet? Where will the committee meet? Who will track the committee's progress? What are the committee goals and expectations? These questions and many others must be clarified and answered, and it takes time and effort to do this well. Perhaps it is the time required for this step that causes many green industry professionals to leap ahead impatiently and start implementing projects before they have adequately developed any comprehensive information or program guidelines. Do not make this mistake. Refer to the four P's of environmental stewardship and be a courageous chairman. Let's take a look at the processes involved in selecting and developing members of an environmental committee.

Where Do You Look to Begin Filling Positions in Your Committee?

As chairman of the environmental committee, you are responsible for identifying and recruiting all of the members of the environmental committee. You must find committee members who can bring a variety of skills to your environmental efforts now and in the future. These people are out there, but where? First, look inside your operation for committee members. These people will bring property and operational knowledge and require very little orientation or additional training. Often, to gather specialized environmental skills for your environmental committee, you will need to expand your search to include community and industry leaders. There are two types of environmental committee members, categorized according to their affiliation to the property(s). The first type is staff members or **internal environmental committee members**. These people will be from within your operation and will likely all be paid for their time and talents utilized by the environmental committee. The second type of environmental committee members will be **external environmental committee members**. These people will come from a variety of backgrounds outside your business operation and will likely be volunteers. There are no strict rules in this situation, so it will fall to you, taking into consideration any budget guidelines, to establish the ratio between internal and external committee members. It is also a good time to point out that you may need to reciprocate with other green industry professionals in your area by agreeing to serve on their green team or similar group in return for their service on yours. This is a great form of environmental collaboration and creates a win-win situation for all involved.

Selecting Internal Environmental Committee Members

It is a good idea to send out a **call for service** or post a formal **sign-up sheet** to gauge interest in serving on the committee prior to forming any preconceived notions on your part. These two documents work well together, with one posted in the office and the other sent by e-mail. This is a very comprehensive way to identify all interested parties without any guesswork. When you have the lists of potential committee members, you will need to evaluate each person's qualifications. Try to identify key staff members with versatile skill sets and a strong commitment to the property and the environment.

Perhaps the hardest choice when forming your environmental committee is reviewing your operation's staff and deciding who should be included on your environmental committee. There is no doubt that there are no easy choices here. You should definitely focus on qualifications but there may also be some office politics that may have an impact. For example, leaving your controller off of your environmental committee and then asking him for additional funding later in the year can be problematic, as can assuming that the general manager is too busy to serve on the committee and then finding out that he or she took it personally not being included as part of an award-winning environmental program. Be mindful of friendships and work ethic because this will be a working committee and sometimes more can actually be less. You cannot always be sure that adding another member to your environmental committee will result in accomplishing more work. Here is a list of potentially good choices to serve as internal committee members.

Possible internal environmental committee members

- General manager
- Administrative assistant
- Mechanic (lead)
- Controller/accounting manager
- Building maintenance manager/supervisor
- Director of golf
- Landscape manager/supervisor
- Architect/designer
- Assistant managers
- Human resources manager/specialist
- Corporate/division manager (if part of a larger company or corporation)
- Horticulturalist
- Arborist
- Greenskeeper/groundskeeper

The importance of using all of the resources within your operation cannot be overstated. These individuals understand many intangibles that range from company culture to property expectations and will require very little orientation to you or your property. While these traits are very useful and positive it is sometimes necessary to reach outside your operation to access a certain skills set or perhaps simply to gain a different perspective. This is a necessity for smaller operations that have a limited number of staff. To accomplish this, you will need to select external environmental committee members.

Selecting External Environmental Committee Members

It is sometimes difficult for a green industry professional to admit that he or she needs help. The industry is famous for independent problem solvers. However, there are many examples of green industry professionals that are not willing to accept help or involve external experts in critical programs. This is often the case when an environmental management program stalls or fails to meet its intended goals. Always seek excellence and try to fill your external committee with members who have different skill sets than you have. This will ensure synergy and an atmosphere of edification within your environmental committee.

There many great sources available to choose from when you are looking for external environmental committee members. Try to focus on filling these selections with people that add strengths and experiences that are not represented within your internal committee selections. Here is a list of great sources to serve on your green team.

Possible External Environmental Committee Members

- Local green industry professionals
- County extension agents
- University professors/researchers
- Local school teachers/administrators
- Local/state officials (EPA inspectors, agriculture commissioner or representative, water shed official)
- Community members
- Garden clubs
- Environmental groups
- Bird-watching clubs
- Green industry association leaders (local, regional, or national)
- Water authorities
- Regulatory authorities/inspectors
- Local business owners/mangers
- Homeowner association representative

The role of the external environmental committee member is to add certain skill sets or offer a unique view that perhaps does not exist in the internal environmental committee. For example, you may ask the president of the local bird watching club to serve on your green team to bring his expertise on nest boxes and bird habitat. You may also consider asking a local arborist to serve on the committee if you have large arboricultural assets within your green space. Local universities are also full of great minds and hands that can add a lift to the quality of your green team. You may also consider joining an organization such as Audubon International. Audubon International offers a series of certifications and environmental support for a set fee. Memberships are usually very affordable and can gain you access to the latest environmental innovations.

The chemistry of your green team is very important. Your goal is to encourage collaboration and synergy, so you want to ensure that the internal and external environmental committee members all can work well together and will follow your leadership. You can make the environmental committee selection and service process very formal. You can require letters of acceptance and establish officers and enforce detailed parliamentary procedures. This certainly has worked in some situations. This approach may even be mandated under certain highly sensitive environmental situations that deal with endangered species, protected waterways or other sensitive environmental issues. However, I have found that a less formal, but still organized, approach works best. Creating forms to document some basic information about your committee members can be very helpful. See Table 1.1 for a checklist of the basics requirements for members of your environmental committee.

Table 1.1 Checklist for Environmental Committee Service

Name: _____

Title: _____

Contact Information: _____

Internal Candidate

External Candidate

Primary Skill Set

Financial/Business

Management/Operations

Table 1.1 Continued

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- Environmental/Specific Discipline: Water, Habitat, Resource Management, etc.
 - Equipment/Technical
 - Documentation/Research
 - Public Relations
 - Agronomic
 - Horticulture/Arboriculture/Forestry/Green Industry
 - Teaching/Presentations
 - Safety
 - Other
 - Length of Committee Service (From xx/xx to xx/xx)
 - One Year (most common)
 - Two Year (alternating so that the committee rotates every two years)
 - Three Years (may coincide with environmental certification cycles)
 - Other

Previous Environmental Committee Service Affiliations

- Audubon International
- Master Gardeners Association
- Golf Course Superintendents Association of America
- Metro Landscape Contractors Association
- Professional Grounds Management Association
- Michigan State University
- Environmental Protection Agency
- Upper Chattahoochee River Keepers
- Newton County High School
- Environmental Educators Association
- Other
- Notes of Interest

Acceptance/ date of committee service

How Many People Should Be on Your Environmental Committee?

The size of your environmental committee is a matter of personal preference and experience. See Figure 1.1 for an actual environmental committee meeting in progress. Environmental committees will usually range from three members for small sites and up to fifteen (or more) for larger very complex green spaces. I believe that a smaller group can often be very effective and be more flexible in relation to meetings and establishing program goals. However, a larger group will have an advantage when it comes to dividing projects and workload. The important thing to focus on is the effectiveness of the committee and each individual's role within the committee. Do not be afraid to replace or eliminate a committee member if necessary. You can expect the size and of your green team and the involvement of the members to ebb and flow as major environmental milestones come and go. This is natural just like the changing of the seasons. Your role as chairman is to keep the program alive and sustainable. Here is a list of your duties as chairman of the environmental committee.



Figure 1.1 An environmental committee meeting is being conducted with the four members of the committee. Note that the committee is using a flip chart, periodicals, and notebooks/pads and that the location of the meeting is comfortable and private to facilitate an efficient meeting.

Environmental Committee Chairman's Checklist

- Select the members of the committee
- Determine length of service for committee members
- Establish meeting schedules and locations
- Lead discussions
- Establish goals with and for the committee
- Record minutes of meetings/recommendations
- Evaluate committee effectiveness
- Provide resources as needed
- Develop documentation/dissemination processes
- Record evidence of sustainability

Summary

The environmental committee will be involved in much of the planning and program establishment within your environmental program. The entire environmental committee will look to you to lead the effort but will offer you their help and support. Utilize your committee wisely and delegate many things to these highly skilled stakeholders. They will assist you in identifying worthy projects and case studies. They will gather statistics, measurements, and photos. They will provide ideas and best management practices all aimed at a greener operation. They will offer feedback on what is working and what is not, and they will keep you grounded as you lead the environmental efforts as committee chairman. The collaboration within the committee itself will be a great asset, but perhaps the biggest advantage to forming your environmental committee as your first step of your environmental management program is the accountability between the environmental committee chairman and the committee members. This accountability will be tested as you develop more detailed programs, and you will quickly learn the value of each member of your committee and why it takes teamwork to achieve sustainability, environmental excellence, and transparency.