

# Creating an Effective Green Team

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In February, the New Jersey League of Municipalities (NJLM), in collaboration with the Municipal Land Use Center, New Jersey Sustainable State Institute and other key environmental partners, rolled out the Sustainable Jersey initiative, a green certification and funding program for municipalities. This program came out of the NJLM Mayors' Committee for a Green Future co-chaired by Mayor Meryl Frank of Highland Park and Mayor Fred Profeta of Maplewood. It offers a helpful roadmap for towns to identify and perform environmentally important actions such as creating a natural resource inventory, conserving energy and promoting green building.

Sustainable Jersey certifies New Jersey municipalities through a 100-point system. Certification requires adopting a municipal resolution to pursue certification and forming a municipal "green team." The program awards additional points for completing various actions that qualify for 10 to 30 points each, such as performing a municipal energy audit, adopting a water conservation ordinance, calculating a community's carbon footprint, etc.

For towns that already have an environmental commission, forming a green team offers a tremendous opportunity to increase the commission's visibility and expand local participation in its

sustainability efforts, which is likely to help advance the commission's goals.

A green team can be:

- newly created by the mayor and council,
- a subcommittee of the existing environmental commission,
- a partnership between the municipality and a community-based organization, a nonprofit or an academic institution.

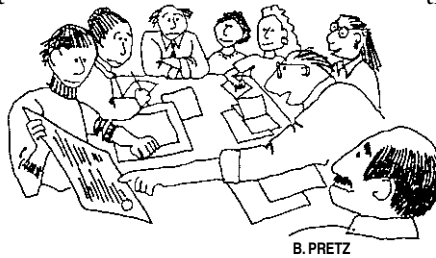
Whether the commission spearheads the green team or is a key member of

the municipal green team, one of the team's key functions will be working toward green certification under the Sustainable Jersey program.

The green team should be formed by municipal resolution, proclamation or

ordinance and include broad representation from various private and public segments of the community that have a stake in its success. Key members might include:

- mayor
- environmental commission
- council members
- planning and zoning boards
- municipal staff and departments
- other municipal boards and commissions
- board of education
- local businesses
- library
- utilities
- colleges or universities
- hospitals



- civic organizations
- faith communities
- concerned citizens

## Importance of green teams

According to Sustainable Jersey's web site, "Creating a sustainable community will require leadership, vision and a commitment to starting the long-term journey toward sustainability. Green teams are the catalyst for creating an understanding of what sustainability means in your community. It does not matter what you call your green team – what matters is that your community is working together in a coordinated fashion to create a more sustainable set of goals, policies and actions. The success of the community's sustainability efforts going forward depends on how well the entire community is included at the beginning of the process."

If your town is in the process of forming a green team, here are some practical suggestions to assist you in moving forward:

### 1. Start from where you're at

– Your green team should reflect your community.

Where is the enthusiasm for the environment coming from in your municipality? The environmental commission? A nonprofit organization or university? The local high school? Are there major environmental organizations active in your city? Who is capable of bringing together a diverse group of people and managing the group without pushing a specific agenda? Who has a track record of success? There are as many ways to create a green team as there are municipalities.

**2. Identify new and enthusiastic leadership (without alienating the old guard)** – Creating a green team offers the exciting possibility of identifying new community leadership. This can be done by casting a wide net and approaching people and groups that are not traditionally seen as "environmental," such as

church and civic groups. Community members that have strong organizational skills, great personalities, wide circles of influence, abundant enthusiasm and energy should be approached to participate. It is important to balance the new leadership with the wisdom and experience of key long-time environmental advocates in your community.

**3. Don't hesitate to educate** – Whenever possible, green teams should provide some form of education. There are many interesting organizations, speakers and specialists in the sustainability movement who can provide information and resources to your green team.

**4. Inform and involve as many as you can** – Use strong outreach efforts to inform the greater community about your activities. Among the many ways commu-

nities connect with the public are through regular

press releases, web sites, information tables at events, Facebook pages, newspaper columns, local cable TV shows and YouTube videos. Consider creating an internet database

or list serve to publish green team meeting minutes. Send out meeting reminders to increase attendance. Give everyone a role in the process by encouraging team members to bring their unique talent, enthusiasm, work ethic, etc. to the table.


**5. Don't overwhelm your volunteers** – Although a core group of people often provides the glue that keeps projects together, share the workload and responsibility to avoid burnout. Find as many ways as you can to thank your volunteers.

**6. Keep meetings interesting** – Invite variety in meeting agendas, limit the length of meetings and select a facilitator who will move things along in a respectful manner. Team members will stop coming if the meetings get too long, boring or overly contentious.



7. **Bring youth to the mix** – Involving young people can add new energy to the process and provide a mechanism for “passing the baton” to the younger generation. Younger people bring new skills, especially in terms of social networking opportunities.

8. **Have fun and celebrate your successes** – Don’t forget the social aspect – community-building activities might include food, games, celebrations, music, art and face-to-face networking.

Sustainable Jersey, in collaboration with ANJEC and several other organizations, has developed a nine-page tool kit on “Creating a Green Team,” available at [www.sustainablejersey.com](http://www.sustainablejersey.com). ANJEC Sustainable Communities Director Julie Lange Groth is also available to help you get answers to your questions about green teams at (973) 539-7547 or [jlange@anjec.org](mailto:jlange@anjec.org). 

### *Quotable Note*

**“The greenest building is the one that already exists.**

Preservationists have estimated that it takes decades for an energy-efficient new building to conserve the amount of energy lost in demolishing an existing building, and that a green rehabilitation can greatly improve energy efficiency without compromising historic fabric and without the loss of embodied resources.”

– From *San Francisco's new green building ordinance*  
(on file in the ANJEC Resource Center)

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