

# Frequently Asked Questions About the Green Office Challenge

February 15, 2010



## What is the Green Office Challenge?

The Green Office Challenge is an innovative new program that engages property managers and office tenant companies in a friendly competition to green their buildings, saving energy and money and reducing water use and waste. The Challenge was developed by the City of Chicago Department of Environment and ICLEI-Local Governments for Sustainability USA, and launched in 2009, focusing on downtown Chicago buildings and tenants. In 2010, ICLEI will expand the program to selected communities around the country.

## There are many programs to help businesses “go green”; how is the Green Office Challenge different?

City of Chicago’s extensive research about the commercial building sector revealed that recognition and competition are key ingredients to participation. Office tenant companies are more likely to sign up for a friendly competition to green their buildings than a program that simply offers training and tips. Keeping score keeps it fun.

City of Chicago also found that businesses are eager to receive recognition for their green achievements from the mayor (at an awards ceremony) and through the media. Formal recognition can help companies gain a competitive advantage and brand them as environmental leaders. By emphasizing friendly competition and recognition, the Green Office Challenge can engage more businesses and achieve greater results.

## How does the program work?

Property managers and office tenants register for the Challenge and commit to a year-long program in which they will receive ongoing training, support, and resources as they move through a six-step process:



- Assess performance (benchmarking energy and water use, waste diversion, transportation choices, etc.)
- Set goals (reduce energy use 20 percent, divert 50 percent of waste from landfills, etc.)
- Create a plan to meet goals
- Implement the plan
- Evaluate progress
- Recognize accomplishments

At the end of one year, those companies that have made the greatest strides in environmental performance will be recognized by the mayor for their accomplishments. Conducted year after year in a city or county, the Green Office Challenge can help the business community save significant money and reduce overall energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

## How is the program different for tenants and property managers?

Office tenant companies compete against other office tenant companies, property managers compete against other property managers. Each group receives tailored trainings and resources.

Office tenant participants receive a “green office scorecard” that helps them establish baselines for their current environmental performance and get started on 50 green strategies to address office energy and water use, waste, transportation, and outreach.

Property managers that participate in the Challenge work toward achievements in four primary areas: energy, waste, water, and tenant engagement. Special recognition is also provided for those that implement innovative strategies such as installing a green roof or instituting a composting program.

## Why did City of Chicago and ICLEI create this program?

In late 2008, the City released the Chicago Climate Action Plan, one of the country’s most comprehensive and ambitious plans to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and mitigate climate change. The plan sets a goal to reduce GHG emissions by 25 percent below 1990 levels by 2020. In Chicago, building energy use accounts for approximately 70 percent of the city’s total GHG emissions, including 39 percent from commercial buildings. The City recognizes that to reach the GHG reduction goal in its climate action plan, it must engage the business community and help them reduce their energy use and greenhouse gas emissions.

ICLEI played an integral role in the development of the Challenge to support City of Chicago, an ICLEI member local government. ICLEI’s goal is to further adapt and standardize the program so that it can be replicated by ICLEI’s 600 other U.S. local government members.

## Do other communities have their own Green Office Challenge program?

Yes. In February 2010, ICLEI launched a pilot program to provide guidance and technical support to help four communities set up their Challenge programs: Charleston, SC; Nashville, TN; Arlington County, VA; and City San Diego/Port of San Diego, CA. These pilot participants aim to launch their own programs by fall 2010.



Beyond these pilots, other communities are also interested in launching their own programs. Westchester County, NY, and the St. Louis, MO, region have already done so. For these local governments, as well as the pilots, ICLEI will create a Green Office Challenge network to help them share ideas and discuss challenges over conference calls and e-mail. ICLEI is also in the process of creating an implementation guidebook.

## What challenges do local governments face in setting up a program?

The Green Office Challenge program is best suited for local governments that have already been working to address climate, energy, and sustainability issues. The four ICLEI pilot communities have all conducted greenhouse gas emissions inventories, set GHG reduction targets, and crafted climate action plans to meet those targets. The Green Office Challenge must be integrated into these wider goals and targets. The pilot local governments also possess the staff expertise, resources, commitment, and political will from elected officials necessary to achieve success and maintain the program over the long term.

Another key to success for any local government is to develop local partners to support and provide resources for the Challenge, including chambers of commerce, utilities, and business associations.

## How successful has the Chicago program been so far?

In the first year, more than 160 downtown office tenants and 45 have enrolled in the program. Participating properties include Willis Tower (formerly Sears Tower), which is managed by U.S. Equities Realty. Participating office tenants include AARP, The Boeing Company, and Microsoft.

Formal data on participant achievements has not yet been compiled, but a report will be released by ICLEI and City of Chicago in spring 2010.

## How can I learn more about the Green Office Challenge?

- Visit the Chicago Green Office Challenge website to learn more about how it works and view a full list of participants:  
<http://www.chicagogreenofficechallenge.org>
- Visit the Green Office Challenge page on the ICLEI USA website:  
<http://www.icleiusa.org/programs/climate/chicago-green-office-challenge/>
- For media inquiries, contact Don Knapp, Senior Communications Office at ICLEI USA, who can arrange interviews with local government staff or Amy Malick, ICLEI Program Manager and a principle architect of the Green Office Challenge. You can reach Don at 510-844-0699, Ext. 315, or [don.knapp@iclei.org](mailto:don.knapp@iclei.org).
- To learn more about ICLEI's mission and its local government members, visit <http://www.icleiusa.org>.

