

Growing Boston's Convention and Tourism Industry by Making the City a Green Convention and Tourism Destination¹

This project, developed in conjunction with various sectors of Boston's convention and tourism industry, involves a diverse array of sustainable practices. The project aims to help the City's convention and visitor industry grow by differentiating Boston as an environmentally appealing or "green" destination. The project engages individual businesses and associations, including Boston's convention centers, Massachusetts Lodging Association, Massachusetts Restaurant Association, Chefs Collaborative, transportation vendors, tour operators, event planners and visitors' offices.

The project encourages businesses to become recognized as environmentally preferred facilities/operations by:

- carrying out initiatives necessary to become qualified for existing certification programs;
- meeting other types of existing standards or
- describing their facility's environmental achievements.

Organizational Structure

The project is staffed by Executive Director Dan Ruben. Dan previously headed the Coalition for Environmentally Responsible Conventions (CERC), which worked to minimize the local and global environmental footprint of the major 2004 national political conventions by reducing emissions associated with global warming, decreasing waste, encouraging public transportation and low emissions vehicles, and promoting environmentally preferable products and services.

A steering committee composed of twenty business, city, state and government leaders provides guidance for the project. An average of eight members attend steering committee meetings and some members carry out specific tasks between meetings. In addition, several people not directly involved in the tourism industry have been attracted by the project's mission and have volunteered their time to complete tasks such as logo and web design.

Incentives for Business Involvement

The most common motivation for businesses that become involved in Boston Green Tourism (BGT) is the prospect of attracting new customers – organizations that demand environmental best practices at their conventions and meetings. New revenue is the most important incentive for business participants. Reducing costs is also a motivation, and participation in the project provides them with goals and deadlines that are helpful in achieving cost reduction objectives. Other incentives for involvement include:

- high energy prices

¹ Program description derived from a similarly titled concept paper prepared by Daniel Ruben and an extensive conversation with Dan on April 3, 2006.

- being part of a larger initiative – Boston Green Tourism as a whole
- not wanting to be left behind by other businesses that are becoming green certified. Further, Boston Green Tourism helps Boston maintain its competitiveness against travel destinations that are already touting their environmental attributes, such as Portland, Pittsburgh and San Francisco.
- the opportunity to network with peers. The professionals involved in the project enjoy the networking socially, use it to identify job opportunities and appreciate being able to build their skills by learning from peers.
- the resources provided by project staff, which ease the task of greening their operations.
- the benefits of green certification. The certification process provides them with concrete goals that focus them on accomplishing the tasks needed to green their business. Some certification programs help them calculate their current status on a variety of metrics, providing valuable benchmarks. Further, a green certification gives them a tangible way to distinguish themselves from other businesses, improving their ability to market themselves. Finally, Boston Green Tourism will market them if they become green certified. GBT expects to designate these distinctions on the Convention and Visitors Bureau and the MA Lodging Association websites.
- satisfaction from making environmental improvements, in the case of some businesses.
- the ability to satisfy staff who have been requesting such changes, in the case of some businesses.

In all, twenty-four hotels have been invited to participate in the Boston Green Tourism as of April 2006. About six have explicitly declined. By April 2007, BGT expects to have about one third to one half of Boston-area hotels participating. Four restaurants and event centers are participating. Three convention centers in Boston (Hynes Veterans Memorial Convention Center, Seaport Hotel World Trade Center and the Boston Convention and Exhibition Center) are involved as well.

Disincentives for Involvement

Two 4-star hotels choose not to get involved in BGT because they believe it would compromise the service they offer their guests. Competing demands on staff time and capital may also discourage some businesses from participating in the Project.

Technical Assistance

Boston Green Tourism emphasizes that green convention and tourism customers value the following characteristics in facilities and services:

1. facilities that reduce fossil use through energy efficiency, energy conservation, and use of renewable energy,
2. transportation alternatives that are energy efficient and have low emissions,
3. water use efficiency,
4. solid waste reduction and recycling,
5. healthy indoor air quality and minimization of toxic substances,
6. local and organic food

7. consumer education about the environment, and
8. the purchase of environmentally friendly products.

The extent of the technical assistance provided by the Boston Green Tourism staff depends on the type of business.

Hotels

Dan Ruben meets with each hotel to sell them on becoming involved in Boston Green Tourism. Most hotels aren't aware that they can become green certified. So, an important part of BGT's technical assistance effort is promoting the benefits of achieving these certifications. A second technical assistance component involves helping staff learn how to become a green hotel. Dan provides them with information on how to set up a "Green Team;" how to figure out what their current resource usage is and what goals they need to achieve. Dan will generally meet with the hotel's engineer to brief him/her on the process of becoming green certified, and he'll arrange for the hotel staff to tour another hotel that has already greened its operations.

A third important technical assistance component involves helping hotels judiciously select options for action and resources for completing those actions. Resources are widely available, and many hotels have sophisticated staff that could figure out how to pursue these actions on their own. But, having someone point them in the right direction is of significant value to hotel staff. Dan responds to specific questions regarding product and service vendors; educates hotel staff about various websites and other information sources and steers them towards actions that are likely to help them achieve their goals.

Dan organizes lodging committee meetings, at which hoteliers help shape the training and technical assistance offered to BGT members. Lodging committee members also take an active role in growing the ranks of hoteliers who join BGT and decide to become green certified. Therefore, committee discussions also focus on outreach efforts to potential new members. Dan also organizes informational meetings with the Energy Star and Green Seal certifying organizations, which are attended by all of the Project's hotel participants. Finally, he organizes a green hotel seminar.

Restaurants

Boston Green Tourism's role is to get restaurants and event centers to achieve Green Restaurant Association certification. The Green Restaurant Association charges a fee for certification that covers the Association's time to carry out most of the work needed to accomplish four sustainability projects in the restaurant each year. BGT has a Food Committee consisting of three restaurateurs. They don't meet as frequently as the hoteliers. However, they do provide guidance and referrals to BGT staff.

Convention Centers

The technical assistance provided by BGT staff to the convention centers has been minimal. In some cases, the convention center staff already has the required expertise to carry out projects on their own. In other cases, the convention centers prefer to operate more independently of Boston Green Tourism.

Boston Green Tourism staff also fosters less formal networking opportunities than those described above. For example, Dan Ruben might suggest to the engineer at Hotel A that he seek advice from Hotel B's engineer, who happens to be knowledgeable about a particular energy efficiency technology.

Results

As of early 2006, most Boston Green Tourism participants are focusing on carrying out energy efficiency improvements. They are motivated by achieving Energy Star certification and by rising energy bills. Most hotels are pursuing Energy Star certification rather than Green Seal certification, because it is easier to achieve and will reduce costs most directly. Some hotels have added recycling programs as well. Water isn't expensive enough yet to warrant a great deal of interest.

The energy efficiency improvements that participants are undertaking range from easy to hard, cheap to expensive, capital intensive to behavioral. It is important to note that even changing the lighting in a hotel is very complicated and involves many staff, including designers, facility managers, purchasing and maintenance. Hotels often feature many different lighting effects, which are created by employing a wide variety of lamps and fixtures. Also, aesthetics are key.

All three participating convention centers have started extensive recycling programs, and one has made energy efficiency improvements.

Overall, businesses are making substantial investments of time and money. The Seaport Hotel World Trade Center, for example, is investing \$500,000 in energy efficiency improvements. For most hotels, it is not possible to achieve Energy Star certification without making a financial investment. Of course, there *are* limits on what businesses are willing to spend. A \$100,000 investment with a ten-year payback period, for example, wouldn't often be considered acceptable.

BGT's main measures of success are the number of participating businesses that become Energy Star or Green Seal or Green Restaurant Association certified, as well as the stories that the convention centers can tell about their environmental accomplishments. All three certifying organizations have mechanisms in place to guard against "greenwashing." Energy Star has an independent engineer certify that a business has fulfilled the necessary requirements. Similarly, a Green Seal certifier does an on-site inspection before a certification is awarded. The Green Restaurant Association itself carries out much of the work required for a restaurant to gain certification.

Some of the participating businesses were pursuing energy efficiency improvements (some with the help of third parties) before they became involved in Boston Green Tourism. However, it is the impression of the BGT staff that the goal of becoming green certified motivates them to do more and faster.

The level of enthusiasm exhibited by the business managers involved in the project has exceeded expectations. Some of these individuals display a great deal of initiative in carrying out the sustainable practices that the program promotes. In addition to the incentives for business involvement discussed above, Dan speculates that there are additional reasons why Boston Green Tourism participants are performing above expectations. The opportunity to talk with their peers about their sustainability projects creates a great deal of energy. “They feed off each other,” says Dan. “Sometimes it’s hard to get meetings started because they’re so busy talking.” Further, these are “feel good” projects that bring these managers a lot of satisfaction. And, because they often have staff members who are enthusiastically committed to the projects, improved staff morale is an added benefit.

In the hotel industry, especially, there is a “culture of learning.” Keeping up with the latest technology and best practices is expected. Few of these professionals are environmentalists when they first become involved in Boston Green Tourism. However, the idea that “this is an area of expertise you should have” is persuasive because it is compatible with the industry’s culture. Finally, the feeling of *accomplishing* something – something very tangible – is rewarding to participants. They find that they *do* have the capability to accomplish efficiency improvements and waste reduction and that it’s not that hard.

Secrets to Success in Promoting Sustainability in the Tourism Industry

1. Understand the people you need to work with. You need to be able to speak their language, dress the part and understand their motivations.
2. Convey a sense of commonality with the people you need to work with: “I understand your circumstances.”
3. To get meetings with key decision-makers, it is often necessary to find someone they can’t say no to.
4. Find peers of the people you need to work with to deliver the message.
5. Subtly imply that if they don’t change, they’ll be left behind (if promoting sustainable actions in a municipal context, this would involve pointing out that other cities are doing it, particularly cities with which your target community feels competitive or better than.)
6. Appeal to conscience only rarely and subtly. Dan doesn’t mention environmental protection unless they do.
7. Metrics are very important: “How do you compare to your peers?”
8. Have examples of other hotels that are winners.
9. Make it easy for participants; support them and do a lot of the work for them.
10. Provide networking opportunities.
11. Make participants look good individually and as a group.
12. Show them that you have expertise and that you’re reliable.
13. Find the right level of staff to work with who will communicate the message to the person you’re interested in.
14. Deadlines are an important part of goals: “We’re going public on [date] with our accomplishments.”

15. Boston Green Tourism is a “winner” because its goal, “Make Boston a Green Tourism Destination,” captures people’s imagination while at the same time being achievable and reasonable. The project is also a winner because it provides participants with many more benefits than simply doing the right thing. When the only reason for participating in a project is that it’s the right thing to do, that project is likely to be a “loser.”

Fundraising Strategy

In order to fund the Boston Green Tourism, staff seeks grants from foundations and contributions from hotels, restaurants and product and service vendors. There is also a pending earmark to the state budget that is intended to provide support for Boston Green Tourism.

Prepared by:
Aceti Associates
Arlington, MA
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