



Community and Economic Development in North Carolina and Beyond Blog: Lessons in sustainability: Align the business office with facilities management

By CED Guest Author

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Across the country, organizations are looking inside to identify ways that they can improve their impact on the environment. Some are taking a formal approach: conducting inventories, hiring sustainability coordinators and adopting green building policies. Others are just trying to do the right thing, or in some cases, just trying to save a buck.

The School of Government (SOG) has taken a hybrid modus operandi (not to be confused with a hybrid mode-of-transportation, which we hope to have soon) to greening its operations. A group of students (MPA), faculty and staff has formed and met under the name of SOGreen with the goal of moving the School toward a more sustainable future. The group benefits from a myriad of expertise and interest levels. Although, two of the more critical participants have been the business and facilities offices: the responsible party for paying and driving the utility bills, respectively.

This is not always a group that communicates. Many times the person that is responsible for maintaining and operating the building and grounds never sees the water, power or gas bills. Meanwhile, someone in the business office just writes checks every month for a bill that, until recently, was a small component of operating costs. There is a definite disconnect. Kind of like your teenager that takes 30-minute showers. HE doesn't have to pay the bill!

Moreover, many times individual departments have no real incentive to increase efficiency or conserve utilities. Headquarters will not give any more money to departments just because they save on utilities. The money budgeted for utilities will simply go somewhere else and may or may not benefit that department. In a time of economic tightening, that can be a huge barrier to significant cost savings on utilities that could be gained from behavior change or small up-front investments.

Who pays the bill in your organization? Do they communicate with the folks that manage the building? Do you even track energy, water and gas use? Do your facility managers have an incentive to maximize efficiency in your organization's buildings and on your grounds?

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