Greening government services

WHITE PAPER

Introduction

Over the past two years, significant progress has been made to "Green the Capitol" by transforming the facilities and administrative services support operations throughout the House of Representatives.

There were three major goals for this initiative:

Goal #1: Operate the House in a carbon-neutral manner by the end of the 110th Congress.

Goal #2: Reduce the carbon footprint of the House by cutting energy consumption by 50% in 10 years.

Goal #3: Establish House operations as a model of sustainability.

According to a 2008 year end report by the Office of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the House had reduced its carbon footprint by 74% by the end of 2009. A year later, the House had made even more progress and included among its successes the shredding of over 30 tons of paper. The CAO's office has stated that since April 2009, House efforts have saved 1 million sheets of paper each month and diverted 75,000 pounds of solid waste from landfills. It also has cut 175,000 kilowatt hours of electricity and 400,000 pounds of carbon emissions. The CAO has recently begun expanding the work of the "Green the Capitol" staff to include supporting sustainability makeovers in their district offices.

In 2009, President Obama issued a wide-reaching executive order on environmental requirements for federal government agencies. It sets targets in many areas such as waste diversion and sustainable acquisition, and requires an Environmental Management System (EMS) at all appropriate organizational levels. In late January 2010, the White House announced that the federal government would reduce its greenhouse gas emissions by 28% over the next decade. The administration will measure each agency's progress on an annual basis and post the results online for the public.

The challenge to achieve these targets is substantial, given the scale and diversity of facilities and administrative operations that are overseen by executive branch agencies.

Agencies can make significant progress toward achieving both their sustainability goals and their budget objectives by taking a fresh look at the core functions and processes within their organizations that involve mail, print, imaging, and document-related management services. Neither paper nor electronic communication is always environmentally superior. The impact depends on the user's behavior and processes. An environmentally sound program is designed around sustainability.

Some focus areas

There are three key areas that every agency can focus on when addressing sustainability issues: reducing energy consumption, reducing waste, and improving productivity. In fact, many of the ways in which green programs are implemented in organizations responsible for administrative services actually provide substantial overlapping budgetary and productivity benefits.

One of the more easily impacted components of administrative services is energy consumption. Significant reductions in energy use can be achieved by replacing old office equipment with more energy efficient devices. There is now a wide range of office equipment available from well known suppliers that meet the ENERGY STAR standards for energy consumption. These products tend to have low energy consumption and many are designed to shut themselves off when not in use. Commonly used office products that are now available with ENERGY STAR ratings include computers, copiers, multifunctional devices (MFDs), and mailing equipment.

EPEAT (Electronic Product Environmental Assessment Tool), a government program that focuses on green technology, certifies information technology products for government agencies. EPEAT products are considered environmentally friendly because they use less energy, have less packaging, and tend to include recycled components. Federal government agencies are required to purchase EPEAT products 95 percent of the time.

Another voluntary government program, the Federal Electronics Challenge (FEC), focuses on encouraging agencies to purchase greener electronics products, reduce the impact of electronic products during use, and manage obsolete electronics in an environmentally safe way. In addition, the Electronics Reuse and Recycling Campaign (ERRC) targets end-of-life issues around IT equipment. This program contributed significantly to efforts to reduce energy use, greenhouse gases, solid waste, and costs related to some of the thousands of government computers that are disposed of each week, according to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA).

Reducing waste extends well beyond recycling old computers, however. Agency waste reduction goals can be achieved by implementing such seemingly mundane changes as using the default setting on individual and shared printers to print on both sides of the page, recycling ink and toner cartridges, and establishing a recycling program for non-working electronic equipment. Many of these programs can be implemented as part of the standard contract for administrative services that agencies sign with their

vendors. Others can be set up with the help of the agency's own environmental office, the GSA or the Office of the Environmental Executive (OFEE).

The greatest impact on both the environment and the agency budget frequently comes as a result of increased productivity due to process reengineering efforts. Many government processes that provide internal support and benefits to citizens remain heavily paper based. Government pamphlets are routinely printed and stored in warehouses for distribution. Citizens looking for access to government services are frequently asked to print out a form from the agency website and submit it to the agency in hard copy (with attachments) for processing. Once the envelope from the citizen arrives at the agency, it often remains in hard copy, and is frequently reproduced in additional hard copies as it winds its way through the necessary review and approval processes. The citizen then receives a hard copy benefits approval or Explanation of Benefits (EOB) notice through the mail. All of these steps use energy, produce waste, cost money, and slow the speed at which citizens receive approval for their benefits.

By documenting and reengineering activities such as the benefits application process and related internal workflows to make them more electronically accessible, agencies can improve the level of service they provide and reduce the cost of providing that service. They also can reduce their carbon footprint. With the help of approaches such as Lean Six Sigma, many agencies are now working to replace their heavily paper-based processes with largely electronic ones. They also are starting to image incoming paper documents as early in the review and approval process as possible. The Department of State and the Department of Homeland Security are both working to expand their use of electronic documents in a way that will make their internal and shared responsibilities for immigration filings, passports and other shared activities more efficient.

Some immediate steps that can be taken

Create a roadmap for successful green initiatives – It is important to build a workable roadmap for green initiatives within an agency or other organization. Most departments now have a sustainability plan for the entire organization. The challenge is identifying how to apply the goals and strategies of the overall plan to the day-to-day activities of divisions and branches within the agency. This should include a mix of top down and bottom up approaches.

Measure where you are today – Whether beginning a major process reengineering effort or just reducing monthly paper

costs, it is important to have good data about the current status of your administrative services operations, and to aggressively track and document mail and print volumes within the organization. Most current print devices can be networked and tracked using software designed to produce an accurate roadmap of usage and related costs. This data can then be used to track the carbon footprint related to the activities for which the equipment is used.

Take advantage of low hanging fruit – There are many steps that offices can take to have an immediate impact on their carbon footprint and daily operational costs, such as:

- Using the default settings on printers and multi-function devices to provide double-sided printing and copying.

- Purchasing green materials and supplies from the approved GSA list.

- Partnering with green service providers whenever possible. If you're not sure about your current vendors' status, review their corporate sustainability report.

- Establishing an integrated records management system —many storage requirements can be eliminated if proper records management policies and procedures are established. Also, provide secure shredding bins throughout your facility. Individuals are reluctant to throw documents in the trash if they are unsure of the privacy and security status of the items. If not stored and disposed of properly, paper documents can be a risk to agencies and the citizens they serve.

- Implement a recycling plan for paper, ink cartridges and electronic equipment.

Use available tools – There are a variety of tools available to help organizations reduce greenhouse gas emissions related to their office-based operations. One of these is the "Office Carbon Footprint Tool" developed by the EPA "to assist offices in making decisions to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions associated with their activities". It includes examples of carbon-cutting actions such as recycling, waste prevention and green power purchasing. The House of Representatives offers a similar tool—"My Green Office"— which highlights more than 50 greening actions, from installing compact fluorescent light bulbs and smart power strips to purchasing only ENERGY STAR appliances and green office supplies. Offices can chart the progress of their carbon reduction efforts on the "My Green Office" website as well.

Some additional steps to sustainability

There are also a number of steps that government agencies can take that may require a little more time and resources:

Get expert help with mail services – The production and mailing of government documents will probably always be a big part of what agencies do. From the environment's perspective, mail includes the **letters** themselves (the computer, paper, ink, envelope, stamp or indicia inks) + the **people** who deliver them + the **vehicles** they ride in + the **facilities** where they're sorted + the **landfill** where they usually end up when they are no longer useful. By ensuring that materials are properly addressed, agencies can reduce the costs and environmental impact associated with Undeliverable As Addressed mail. Every piece of mail that is returned because of an improper address negatively impacts the agency, the citizen, and the environment. The agency pays postage out and back for the original item and to produce and mail a corrected document. The citizen does not get the document they requested or the benefit they are waiting for. The environment has to bear the impact of the production, transportation and waste associated with the replacement mail piece. Mail services vendors can help prevent these unfavorable outcomes.

Optimize courier routes and delivery schedules – In some cases, an agency may consider reducing the number of mail and courier runs performed on a daily basis. One agency found that it was ultimately cheaper and greener to eliminate some of its dedicated courier runs and instead, use an existing contract with an overnight express courier to move documents around its campus environment. This change reduced the carbon footprint of each individual document that it had normally carried.

Combine like operations – While it is important to reduce energy use and other carbon producing activities at individual facilities, even greater gains can be made by consolidating operations. Many government facilities, especially those that support mail, printing, shredding and other similar services are used only a small amount of time each day. Yet, there is a requirement to provide at least a limited amount of heating and cooling of the buildings on a continual basis. Agencies and their subordinate organizations can make significant steps toward sustainability by consolidating operations in fewer buildings. This eliminates the need to light, heat and cool multiple facilities where the same activities are being performed.

Outsource services to a multi-client facility – While it is not always possible, the most efficient way to maximize the use of equipment is often to move to a multi-client, shared facility operated by a host agency or external vendor. This can save energy and significantly cut capital investment and labor costs. In many cases, shared services providers are also able to provide quality standards and meet service levels that are difficult to sustain in smaller operations with little flexibility in their operations. Multi-client service providers seek to maximize the use of the facilities, equipment and other resources they maintain. Also, because they are designed to operate at peak efficiency, they often have highly defined processes that employ green technology and reduce waste.

Reduce unnecessary physical document requirements – Agencies can further reduce their carbon footprint by structuring their processes so that as many documents as possible are born digital and remain that way. Processes in which a copy of a physical document is required to be submitted with an application should allow for the copy to be submitted and stored *digitally*. Even documents with watermarks, embossed seals, holograms, and other anti-counterfeiting measures can be stored digitally once the original is properly viewed and validated by authorized agency personnel. The same multifunctional device used to make a paper copy of the document can be used to create a digital copy for inclusion in an electronic case management system. Not only can this speed up case management processes; it also helps reduce the volume of paper records stored in local or consolidated records warehouse facilities.

Revisit telecommuting opportunities – In addition to its positive impact on productivity, telecommuting can significantly reduce energy consumption and carbon emissions. Whenever possible, it should become part of an agency's green office initiatives.

Conclusion

Greening the government office requires dedicated focus by the organization, its employees and the vendors and service providers that support it. There is now a wide variety of equipment, tools and processes that can be useful in helping achieve sustainability objectives. Still, the tools themselves are not enough to get the job done. Managers must demonstrate a personal commitment to energy reduction, recycling and related programs for these tools to have a long-lasting impact. They also must be built for sustainability among their employees and require it of their vendors.

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