

Driving Sustainable Behavior in the Office at Arizona State

Executive Summary

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The office of University Sustainability Practices (USP) has been mandated by Arizona State leadership to increase sustainability and decrease negative impacts in the University's operations. Understanding that human behavior change is difficult and yet at the core of its efforts, USP has a variety of initiatives designed to enable more sustainable outcomes at ASU. One of the primary initiatives is USP's sustainability certification programs. These voluntary programs cover most aspects of university life (events, classrooms, sports, offices, etc), and are intended to provide users with a set of achievable sustainability standards. Users who meet these standards are awarded certifications at one of three levels to reflect their accomplishments.

Unfortunately, the certification program has shown mixed results and has thus far failed to help ASU achieve its sustainability goals. USP needs to find ways to increase the participation and performance on the certifications.

This is a big challenge. Over 17,000 employees work at ASU's campuses in the Salt River Valley, and every office is unique. They vary in size, energy consumption, and architecture. There is uncertainty on how to define an office unit, and who is eligible to pursue the certification on behalf of their office. Outreach and incentive programs are still embryonic if they exist at all. The certification is not rigorously coordinated with other sustainability efforts at ASU, such as the Zero Waste initiative, and ASU's Green Purchasing Guidelines. Although ASU remains a national leader in sustainability, too often, the left hand doesn't know what the right is doing in regards to comprehensive change efforts.

The main focus of the project was to help USP identify deficiencies in the reach and performance of the ASU Sustainability Certification for Offices. The importance of identifying barriers to desired results and intervention points where improvements can be made was discussed in depth. An approach known as Community Based Social Marketing (CBSM) was agreed upon as an

effective paradigm to understand the problems and opportunities facing the certification. CBSM holds that only the explicit identification of target audiences (sub-groups of ASU staff) and the barriers they perceive, will reveal intervention points effective for that audience. USP needed high quality qualitative research to enable this process of discovering the barriers to greater sustainability perceived by ASU staff, and how they can eliminate them. USP's ultimate vision and desired outcome for this project was to identify reasons why engagement with the office certification isn't higher, and to use that information to make the office certification an effective driver of sustainability at ASU, creating economic, environmental, and social benefits for the members of the ASU community.

To execute the project mandate, an online survey was created and sent to 504 semi-randomly chosen ASU office staff members. The survey garnered 109 complete responses, a response rate of 21.62%. Researchers also conducted two focus groups and one individual interview. The interviews were designed to solicit open ended responses that are not possible on a multiple choice survey. Analysis of the data provided insight to some of USP's key questions, such as who is interested in pursuing the certification and why?

The results of the research were successful in gaining critical knowledge about the beliefs of ASU office workers. The exposition of a knowledge gap about sustainability and USP's initiatives was a key finding. For respondents who expressed interest in pursuing the office certification, the biggest reason given for not doing so was that they did not know there was a certification available. Staff perceptions that certifications were undue time and energy burdens also stood out. Respondents who said they were not interested in pursuing the certification gave a lack of time or ability as their primary reasons.

Survey outcomes contrast with earlier findings that have shown that over 80% of ASU workers believe that being environmentally responsible in the workplace is important. The new insights complement existing data to provide the high level clarity that USP has been seeking. Although the vast majority of ASU staff want to be more sustainable, they just don't know where to begin. Staff are also somewhat intimidated by what they think being more sustainable entails. Their intimidation can largely be attributed to lack of information, as minimal time and effort are required to realize many

sustainability benefits, such as turning off a personal computer when it is not in use.

Project findings will allow USP to design effective outreach and educational tools to empower staff at ASU to be more sustainable. Future efforts can proceed directly from the recommendations and insights provided by the project.

For next steps, USP should create follow up surveys, using this project's methods. The surveys should drill down deeper into key findings to elicit more nuanced understandings of what motivates behavior change at ASU.

USP can also create a robust educational supplement for the certification. For example, a creative, supplemental toolkit could inform and entertain the user. Relevant links and anecdotes can be embedded within the certification questions, or in a separate format or location. Whenever possible, supplemental information should tell a compelling story. Anecdotes and case studies should be ASU-centric, and designed to inspire the user, that if others have achieved success in their efforts, then it is possible for them as well. Formal outreach and awareness campaigns are the next major steps to be taken. If done correctly, these follow on efforts should create dramatic improvements in ASU's ongoing sustainability efforts.