

Building “Guardian Green”

SYNOPSIS: Guardian Life Insurance Company has a rich history of environmental stewardship through operational sustainability efforts. When they sought to achieve their next phase of sustainability, they recognized that success was contingent upon empowering their employees to engage around those initiatives, and partnered with EarthShare on strategy and implementation.

This EarthShare at Work partnership began with the development of Green Teams, groups charged with helping to implement corporate environmental sustainability initiatives through employee education and action. Recognizing the power and modernity of employee-driven collaboration, EarthShare recommended that Guardian create a Green Team network across the company as a way for people to tap into their own passion for sustainability, and to influence the best ways to translate company priorities into local programming. EarthShare worked with Guardian to establish committed groups of people working regionally to involve their colleagues in the company’s environmental sustainability initiatives. Guardian now has five Green Teams going strong, each with an EarthShare liaison who helps the team strategize and implement local plans to engage their colleagues. Now in its third year, the partnership is fostering the kind of impact that only authentic employee empowerment and community engagement can deliver.

CASE STUDY

1. **The Opportunity:** Guardian was making decisions to be environmentally sustainable in their IT infrastructure and real estate portfolio, but employees were not connecting with the “why” of the company’s priority environmental initiatives, nor did they have a participatory role. There was a disconnect between what the company said it stood for and what employees understood and applied in their daily work.
2. **The Solution / Approach:** EarthShare delivers strategy and resources to help connect the dots between employee awareness and activation, and sustainable business initiatives. To effectively channel employee passion, EarthShare develops customized holistic programs to enhance the relationship between a company’s business units, sustainability and engagement goals, and local markets. Program elements build on each other to achieve larger goals, and are developed in close consultation with the company. EarthShare works with local stakeholders to design activities that resonate with employees and accommodate company locations, bringing programs to life through a powerful network of national and local member nonprofits. Program management is provided to direct, implement, and grow the program.

For Guardian, EarthShare created a custom Green Team Guide for the company and helped drive recruitment through program branding (“Guardian Green”), messaging, and sustainability fairs. The messaging helped achieve clarity about how business sustainability goals benefit the environment and the communities where employees live and work. EarthShare also delivered content to inform employees about environmental issues and encourage impactful green behaviors at work and at home. To further support the company’s goals, EarthShare provided referrals to EarthShare member nonprofit experts for consultation on carbon offsets and other enterprise-level sustainability needs.

Each Guardian Green Team has an EarthShare staff liaison who advises on their annual plan and connects them to EarthShare member nonprofits and other community partners to advance awareness and local activity. Liaisons also help identify themes of interest to employees so EarthShare can develop opportunities for enterprise-wide engagement, including events to support sustainable business practices and celebrate Earth Day and other environmental holidays. In 2017, EarthShare advised Guardian on the development of a Green Business Innovation Challenge to garner innovative sustainability ideas from employees across the company. More than 100 ideas were submitted, eight of which were presented to a panel of business leaders and environmental experts. The ideas were directed to task force groups and Green Teams for research and implementation. (*See #4 for examples*)

Today Guardian's Green Teams are fully motivated to take ownership of sustainability, and are expertly connecting to their communities via local and enterprise-level initiatives. One example is a shift in recycling policies inspired by EarthShare awareness-building activities. Employees are being recognized for their work in sustainability and are engaging at deeper levels.

Currently, EarthShare is working with Guardian on employee recognition for their sustainability work, including advice on the use of their sustainable behavior tracking portal, design options for employee badging, and the criteria and nomination process for a Sustainability Champion Award.

3. **Resources / Budget:** For Guardian, this initiative was less about the financial commitment and more about the interpersonal relationships that needed to be developed and sustained inside the company, and with EarthShare and its network. Success required:
 - a. Program budgets for local Green Teams and the national partnership
 - b. Buy-in on all fronts: Employee engagement in Green Teams, corporate decision makers, EarthShare member nonprofits who see the value of corporate opportunities through EarthShare
 - c. Creativity and connections from EarthShare to meet evolving enterprise level needs and local Green Team needs and interests
4. **Results to Date:** EarthShare has helped Guardian build a purpose-driven workforce with increased employee investment in environmental sustainability as a core value, and ignited interest in seeking opportunities to advance it at work and at home. Robust Green Teams are working with EarthShare on local activities that enrich employees and their communities, and which often roll up into enterprise-wide initiatives; employees have greater awareness about environmental issues, how it relates to the business, and their role. The Sustainable Innovation Challenge played an important role in providing a channel for employees' sustainability ideas to garner interest and support from colleagues and reach the attention of company decision makers. In response to employees' ideas, Guardian has implemented software to track the company's environmental impacts in all business units and activities, and is soon rolling out a new Green Sourcing Policy across the enterprise. A Community-Supported Agriculture (CSA) program started with an employee idea inspired by EarthShare in Pittsfield, MA and a concurrent suggestion to use local produce in cafeterias. Now there are CSA programs in six locations, providing employees with local produce while supporting local farms and farmers.
5. **Lessons Learned:** 1) Empower employees and they will rise to the challenge. Meet employees where they are through education, simple calls to action, and storytelling about how the issues impact their work, families, and communities. 2) Good ideas go viral. Local ideas like recycling policy improvements, community-facing events, and CSAs propagate when there is solid internal organization and communication to facilitate the sharing of ideas. 3) If you celebrate employees and their activities, they will forge closer bonds to the company, knowing they have a voice and a stake not just in the everyday business they do, but in the purpose of the company.

HELPFUL RESOURCES AND TOOLS: Learn more about **EarthShare at Work** <http://bit.ly/ESatWork>; **Sustainability and Employee Engagement: The State of the Art**, by GreenBiz in partnership with PwC and National Environmental Education Foundation <http://bit.ly/NEEFreport>; **Cracking the Code on Engaging Employees in Sustainability**, <http://bit.ly/2K7vGmc>

ABOUT THE ORGANIZATIONS:



EarthShare is your nonprofit partner with a 600-member strong network of America's most respected environmental organizations, developing and delivering tailored, strategic programs to help you meet -- and exceed -- your employee engagement, community impact and environmental sustainability goals. For 30 years, EarthShare has worked across industries and issues to protect the health of our planet by engaging workplaces and people as active participants in that mission. With the power to convene the environmental community, galvanize employees and consumers, and build community collaboration, we help our partners achieve their corporate citizenship and sustainability impact vision.



The Guardian Life Insurance Company of America® helps protect families, secure futures and improve well-being through insurance and wealth management offerings for individuals, employers and businesses. Our ability to always put our 26 million customers first is driven by our 158-year heritage as a mutual company committed to serving the long-term needs of our policyholders. With approximately 9,000 employees and a network of over 2,750 financial representatives in 55 agencies nationwide, the entire Guardian team is passionate about advancing innovation, service and knowledge to help build strong families and communities for generations to come.