

Professional Development for Local Government Sustainability Directors

The path for individual professional development in the urban sustainability field isn't clear. In 2011, a group of USDN members created a robust, and still relevant, toolkit.

In 2011, a group of Urban Sustainability Directors Network (USDN) members explored what professional development looks like for local government sustainability directors. The result is (1) a toolkit that explores how to move towards institutionalizing sustainability in local governing structures, (2) a self-assessment tool, and (3) a sample job description for sustainability directors. Now, as we enter 2016, 76% of USDN's founding members have left their jobs as sustainability directors. Second and third generation sustainability directors are now building change in their communities, and the lessons learned in the 2011 USDN Professional Development Toolkit are increasingly important. This article explores the toolkit resources and gives interested supporters a glimpse into what it takes to create change from the inside out.

The full document can be downloaded from the [Innovation Products](#) database at USDN.org. The Professional Development Toolkit can be found [here](#). The zip file includes:

- Evolution of a Sustainability Office Checklist
- A Self-Assessment Tool
- Sample Sustainability Director Job Description

Evolution of a Sustainability Office Checklist

This checklist is a framework to help sustainability directors make sense of the evolution and continuum of institutionalizing sustainability. Four functions of a sustainability office and four phases of evolution frame this tool. Activities range from elected officials' creation of sustainability functions and positions and obtaining funding for that work to developing community support and cultivating public expectations that sustainability initiatives will be sustained and expanded.

The Four Functions of a Sustainability Office

1. *Planning Government's Sustainability Initiatives*: Develop vision, definition, cases, goals for sustainability, and the role of local government. Develop initiatives, plans, and budgets – within departments and across governments. Establish performance metrics, scoreboards, and progress reporting processes. Study other cities' sustainability efforts. Coordinate sustainability planning and goals across departments.
2. *Developing a Government Culture of Sustainability*: Engage employees in thinking and caring about sustainability and trying new behaviors. Conduct internal communications and education to promote a culture of sustainability. Embed sustainability goals and initiatives in employees' position descriptions and performance evaluations.

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The Four Functions of a Sustainability Office (cont'd)

3. *Developing Community Support and Action:* Communicate with public and media about the sustainability vision and initial initiatives. Develop website(s) with resources for sustainability actions. Partner with civic organizations to undertake community visioning processes and community-based sustainability education. Engage stakeholders and constituencies in developing plans and partnering with government on external initiatives. Engage leaders of communities in coordinating and collaborating. Develop a community-wide sustainability scoreboard. Support public outreach/education to increase community awareness of benefits.
4. *Building Government's Structures for Sustainability:* Create sustainability functions with staff and short-term funding. Build connections with outside expertise and peers in other cities. Fundraise to support budget and staffing for sustainability initiative development. Create technical advisory groups. Create incentives (rewards, sanctions) for departments and agencies to achieve goals. Adopt a performance scoreboard for publicizing and monitoring. Create a government-wide sustainability knowledge creation and innovation function. Use "horizontal coordination" among departments to achieve shared goals.

Sustainability Director Self-Assessment Tool

The self-assessment tool is a spreadsheet that builds on a time management framework originally developed by Dr. Steven Covey, author of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. This tool focuses on the professional development opportunities that will have the most impact for sustainability directors as they define and evolve their role in City Hall. For each skill and knowledge area, the tool requires three inputs: 1) existing ability; 2) the importance of that skill or knowledge area to the position; and 3) the level of urgency for professional development in that skill or knowledge area. Based on those three factors, the tool generates a menu of recommended professional development delivery models for each competency. Self-assessors can further prioritize by filtering results based on the three inputs: ability, importance, and urgency.

Sample Sustainability Director Job Description

This job description was developed from a 2011 survey of 82 USDN members. It is not a model job description because there is a high level of local variation in responsibilities and competencies. Instead, it is a standard template that offers composite descriptions. The document includes details on the following areas:

- Variations on job title
- Job definition
- Reporting structure
- Examples of work
- Education requirements
- Experience requirements
- Knowledge and abilities requirements
- Salary range

Director of Sustainability / City of Orlando

Responsibilities

Primary responsibility for the coordination, development, refinement, administration, integration and communication of sustainability policies and practices for the City of Orlando. Responsible for establishment of a well-organized, results-oriented and cohesive sustainability plan and work program. Implements the City of Orlando's Green Works Community Action initiatives, priority policies and administrative directives. Achieves results in a manner reflective of Orlando's balanced approach to building and sustaining a livable and inclusive community; with emphasis on educational excellence, healthy neighborhoods and people, environmental quality, natural resource protection, strategic economic development, growing a green economy, quality jobs, community safety, and arts and culture.

- Serve as subject matter expert to the Mayor, city management, City Council, advisory groups, city operations, partnership entities and internal and external stakeholders for sustainability related policies, practices, programs, procedures and initiatives.
- Demonstrate passion, strong leadership and understanding of resource and water conservation, renewable resources, low impact and conservation development, comprehensive and strategic planning, green purchasing, green building, energy conservation, solid waste recycling, creative funding opportunities and environmental metrics.
- Assess, integrate, implement and recommend modifications to current sustainability policies and initiatives based on experience, expertise, analysis and national and international best practices.
- Develop and annually update an operational strategic plan based on policy and program goals and priorities of decision makers.
- Establish meaningful performance measures for effective decision making; and properly track and report on progress.
- Produce periodic reports showing progress against performance measures and other indicators; recommend new strategies to city management, committees, advisory groups, stakeholders and partners.
- Prepare and effectively communicate complex analytical work products to multiple audiences.
- Actively partner with outside agencies, governments and stakeholders to achieve and enhance sustainability, environmental quality, water quality, air quality, energy efficiency and related results.
- Provide staff support to policy groups, advisory boards, commissions and committees.
- Produce public awareness and educational campaigns which influence others to embrace sustainability practices and ideals.
- Evaluate, respond and recommend responses to proposed legislation and rules of interest that may potentially impact the City of Orlando.
- Assume lead management responsibility for all sustainability policy activities, program services, personnel, fiscal resources and customer service systems.
- Develop and implement policies and practices that optimize and evaluate city investments.
- Duties may also involve research and investigation of issues of significant interest or importance to city officials, policy development, coordination of programs, consultation with State and Federal agency staff, and the submission of reports or investigations to executive management.

Reporting Structure

The Sustainability Office is dynamic by nature with the Director of Sustainability reporting directly to the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and supervising two professional staff and intern(s) as applicable.

Knowledge and Abilities

Knowledge of:

- Current principles and practices of community and corporate sustainability, energy policy and efficiency, conservation, environmental design, comprehensive planning, multi-modal transportation, economic development, and related interdisciplinary concepts.
- Green economy and sustainable development principles, practices and opportunities.
- Principles and practices of public administration and public policy management.
- Data and statistical analysis, performance metrics, performance tracking and reporting.
- Fiscal management, budget development and grants administration.
- Principles and techniques of employee supervision, management and development.
- Advanced oral and written communication as well as a strong ability to educate, persuade and mobilize resources.
- Knowledge of pertinent Federal, State, and local laws, ordinances, statutes, and court decisions relating to municipal sustainability.
- Principles and techniques of employee supervision, management, team building and organizational development.

Ability to:

- Provide oversight and direction for major programs, plans and policies focused on energy management, sustainable transportation and corporate sustainability initiatives that impact municipal operations as well as the broader Orlando community.
- Communicate clearly, effectively and persuasively in all forms, to a variety of audiences.
- Gather and analyze routine and complex data, and interpret and communicate key information for decision-making and formulation of policy recommendations.
- Anticipate and avert potential problems and creatively problem solve.
- Develop strategic direction and program implementation in collaboration with various external and internal policy bodies, partners and stakeholders.
- Develop and properly manage budgets, grants and other outside funding sources; meet or exceed compliance and reporting requirements for all funding sources.
- Identify and secure funding for strategic initiatives from a variety of sources.
- Assemble, attract, retain, develop, train, equip and properly motivate an innovative, enterprising, inclusive, high performance team.

Qualifications

- Bachelor degree from an accredited university in environmental science, environmental management, environmental engineering, urban planning, architecture, business administration, public administration, and/or other related field.
- Six years of sustainability related experience; at least two years in a manager or supervisor capacity
- Master degree in a related field preferred
- LEED GA certification highly desirable

Compensation and Benefits

Salary ranges from \$72,384 to \$117,561 depending on experience and qualifications. This is an appointed position: the incumbent serves at the pleasure of the Mayor. Competitive and comprehensive benefits package including: Health Care, Deferred Compensation (401 and 457 accounts), Life Insurance, Holidays, and Personal Leave/Vacation.