

Business Employee Sustainability Education Survey Highlights

Overview

With the recent explosion of all things “green,” many companies are recognizing the valuable, indeed essential, role their employees play in aligning day-to-day operations with corporate values regarding the environment and sustainability. And yet, we’ve heard from many companies that they are not entirely sure how to effectively educate and involve employees in corporate environmental activities.

In response to growing interest, The National Environmental Education Foundation (www.neefusa.org) has done research on this issue and conducted a survey to gauge how leading companies approach internal employee education and engagement.

The survey is part of a larger study on corporate environmental and sustainability education. The study will document best practices, highlight lessons learned, and examine measures of success. For our audience of business executives and managers, these elements will help define viable, practical strategies to engage employees on a range of in-house environmental and sustainability matters.

Survey Findings

The NEEF survey, conducted in May 2008, examines aspects of corporate environmental and sustainability education initiatives at companies at varying stages of program development: Advanced, Beginner, No program yet, No program in future. There were 1,354 survey respondents, with approximately 300 respondents per track. However, not all respondents answered every question.

The results represent a purposeful sample of those interested in business and environmental issues. More than 87% of those taking the survey represented businesses (Figure 1). Respondents were a mix of mainstream to environmentally progressive large companies and small “green” companies. Presumably, most of the non-business and small green business respondents are from the GreenBuzz mailing list, which has a broad audience beyond corporate employees, and the Co-op America mailing list, which also includes many small green businesses¹. Thus, the small business survey participants may not be representative of typical small businesses but are in an interesting and rapidly growing segment of the business community.

The survey achieved broad industry coverage, with the greatest number of respondents from the consumer goods (19%) and energy (12%) sectors. In terms of size, 40% of respondents

¹ GreenBiz (www.greenbiz.com) and Co-op America (www.coopamerica.org) distributed the NEEF Business and Environment Program Survey to their respective mailing lists.

were from small companies (less than 99 employees), 40% were from medium companies (100 to 9,999 employees), and 20% were from large companies (more than 10,000 employees).

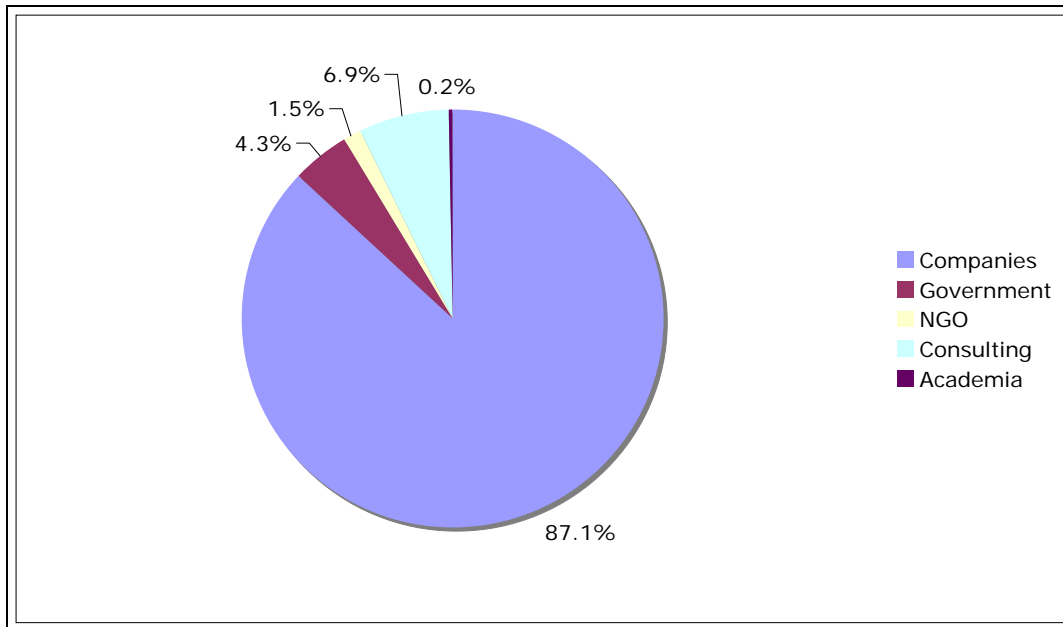


Figure 1: Overview of survey respondents

Participant Overview

- *Sustainability* is the term most often used (by 34% of respondents) to refer to environmental and sustainability (E&S) activities.
- Respondents from small companies are more frequently from marketing and sales or “other” functions; large and medium companies are primarily marketing and sales, EHS, facilities, CSR and “other”.²
- Respondents from small companies are primarily president, owner or CEO; large and medium companies are primarily manager or staff level.

Environment and Sustainability (E&S) Knowledge

- 71.2% of small company respondents place at least some value on job candidates’ environment and sustainability knowledge compared to 56.5% and 46.1% of medium and large company respondents.
- 74.9% of small, 64.3% of medium and 66.5% of large company respondents believe that the value of job candidates’ environment and sustainability knowledge will increase as a hiring factor within five years.

Education

- 50.9% of small company respondents believe that their company has an advanced or very advanced environment and sustainability education program compared to 28.9% and 29.8% of medium and large companies.³

² Respondents from the “other” category include: sustainability office, strategic planning office, engineering, research, finance, consulting and professor.

Trend for E&S Education

- Nearly half (49.4%) of respondents who have no program yet, believe their company will begin educating employees in the next two years (including 14.4% of small, 14% of medium and 11.8% of large company respondents).

Hurdles

- The primary themes among all respondents were the lack of money, time, resources, and executive support; large companies stressed the difficulty of culture change within the company more frequently.

Tools

- Respondents stated the need for similar tools (budget, case studies and success stories, and training materials).

About the National Environmental Education Foundation

The National Environmental Education Foundation provides objective environmental information to help Americans live better every day. We work with professionals in health, education, public lands and media to connect the environment to everyday choices and actions so the public can live well while protecting and enjoying nature. Through our signature programs like National Public Lands Day, Environmental Education Week, Earth Gauge, and the Pediatric Environmental History Initiative, the National Environmental Education Foundation offers Americans knowledge to live by. To learn more, call (202)833-2933 or visit www.neefusa.org.

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For more information about the survey, please contact Krista Gullo at business@neefusa.org.

³ In the survey, education programs levels are defined as:

- Very advanced (High level of employee awareness that supports aligned values, strategy and operations);
- Advanced (High employee awareness and engagement, but some areas still need improvement);
- Improving (Some employee awareness is evident, but still need to change company culture and employee behavior);
- Taking first steps (Exploring ways to achieve this)