

How to start a Green Team

When promoting sustainable research in your organisation or department, support from the top and bottom are equally important. Depending on your organisation's set-up, there may be some top-down initiatives already in place, such as a sustainability strategy including specific targets for the research departments, a dedicated sustainability manager or a green office implementing sustainable initiatives on your campus. Whether this is the case or not, support for sustainable actions in the labs ultimately falls in the hands of the researchers working there day in, day out.

Green teams, Green groups and **Green initiatives** have been popping up all over the scientific community in recent years as grassroots initiatives to initiate, support and promote sustainable research actions by those in the lab themselves. By acting on sustainability with a bottom-up approach, scientists are enabled to implement their own sustainable ideas and measures while giving confidence to maintain research quality.

Here's some recommendations and tips from Green Labs NL based on our experience of starting Green Teams in our institutes!

Gather your crew

When broaching sustainability in your labs, it's good to come with supporters. Not only will having other sustainable enthusiasts on board from the start help to ease the load, it also adds to the ideas factory about what type of projects would be beneficial for your research department(s) and where to get started.

Talk about your ideas with colleagues and work friends and see if you can pick out those that might like to start this grassroots initiative with you. If you work in a large organisation, gathering people from different research departments may help spread the voice and ultimately have a larger impact.

Brainstorm

When creating a new initiative, it is good to collect ideas on where to get started. This will also be important when seeking a stamp of approval from management. Don't forget to use the multiple resources found on the [Green Labs NL website](#) to gather background information and ideas.

Start by looking at your own research habits and identify actions you could easily take to make your work more sustainable. This could be something like adapting your pipelines to reduce unnecessary single-use plastics, switching to a more sustainable [Green Chemistry](#) approved component, switching to [greener algorithms](#) or setting up a simple [data management](#) strategy to avoid unnecessary data storage use. Bring these ideas together with your sustainable enthusiastic colleagues and together start looking at the wider research department. It's key to identify *low-hanging fruit* so that you start tackling ideas that are obtainable, manageable, and easy to implement. For example, these could be [signage](#) for equipment on/off policies, awareness around shutting the sash, or easier access to recycling bins near/in lab spaces.

The stamp of approval

You can implement small changes within your research group (e.g., group sample/data storage management and [lab exit strategies](#), plastic reduction in experimental pipelines, on/off policies for group-owned equipment), however when wanting to start anything on a wider scale in your research department(s), it's likely that you will need to secure support from management (e.g. PI, department head, sustainability manager). This will for instance aid to communicate the initiative wider through institute newsletters, or support conversations with centralised facilities or purchasing departments if you need their input and support on certain changes you want to implement.

As the efforts you make around promoting sustainability in the labs is likely to be on the side of your full-time role, you may want to ask for support from your PI/lab head or supervisor to work on this next to your research projects.

Identify who in your research department or in your institute would be the main authority, or reference person, regarding setting up an institute/department-wide green team. Likely it will be a sustainability manager, if your organisation has one, or research and/or facilities management. **Aim high!** The higher up the support goes, the easier you will find implementation in the long run and the greater success at continuation of initiatives.

Formulate your ideas gathered during brainstorming into a nice presentation or a document and set up a meeting to present them to whoever you are seeking approval from. Find out what ideas may already be in place or in the pipeline from the management perspective but be sure to stress the importance of a bottom-up approach to go with it. Coming well prepared will help to convince them to get on board!

Rally wider interest

Once management is on board, share your plans for the initiative with anyone and everyone in your research department(s). It is likely that you will find other enthusiastic colleagues that may not be in your direct circle who are willing to form the green team with you.

Utilise your department/institute communication channels to invite everyone to a seminar/presentation around sustainable science. These channels could be department-wide email lists, newsletters, intranet pages or screens in communal spaces around the institute. Look into potentially inviting a speaker for the seminar who has done similar work in another institute or elsewhere in the scientific community. Don't hesitate to contact Green Labs NL for this!

If your institute has multiple research departments/faculties, make sure you open up the invitation to all, as having green team members embedded in areas outside your immediate work environment will help to get actions more easily implemented across different departments/faculties.

Connect with your green team

During your seminar, ensure you have a contact point set up for those that want to form the green team with you. It's likely you will have people merely interested in the topic joining the seminar and people that also want to get elbows deep in starting the initiative like you. Make sure they know how to find you, and that you have plans to form a group dedicated to taking action within your institute and department. Set up another more focussed meeting with those that have reached out to discuss how you can get organised and where you want to get started.

Organise your green team

Utilise internal digital spaces that everyone can access to set up chat groups and resource sharing for your green team. These could be designated email lists and/or ideally platforms such as Teams or Slack.

Use your focussed meeting to find out who your fellow green team members are, what their main interests are regarding sustainable research and, based on this, set up work groups. These could be groups such as [Waste](#), [Energy](#), [Purchasing](#), [IT](#), [Communication](#). By spreading the load, it will become easier to get things achieved and not leave members feeling overwhelmed.

If your green team only consists of a few enthusiastic colleagues, tackle topics together on a monthly or bi-monthly basis. Maybe start with a [Shut the Sash](#) campaign or by looking at improving the waste pipelines in the labs. **Start small and concrete!** Manageable chunks are key when it comes to creating a sustaining initiative. Completing your first project, no matter how small, will help strengthen the team and gain confidence for further sustainable action.

Set up a regular meeting time for your green team to connect, report back on what each group/person has been up to, share feedback on the designated projects and see which further ideas can be expanded. Organising a sustainability related activity can help your green team get to know each other and give space to external brainstorming time.

Also consider introducing a sustainable lab programme, such as [LEAF](#), to your institute/department. Such programmes generally come with defined criteria and resources to help you figure out what actions to take and how.

Check out the Green Labs NL resource "[LEAF in your research department](#)"

Communicate

Don't forget that it's very important to communicate your efforts within your organisation but also publicly. Utilise internal communication's lines to keep colleagues updated on your actions and achievements, gaining visibility, and perhaps even see your green team grow.

Also, share what you are up to with the wider scientific community. You can find lots of ideas and resources from other groups on places such as Twitter, LinkedIn, specific group (web-)pages, and of course at the [Green Labs NL](#) community meetings. Don't forget that the community would love to see your tailored resources and ideas too!

Get Greening up your lab!

Looks like you're ready to go and we wish you all the success!

Happy Sustainable Researching

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