

The Challenges of Implementing Sustainability in the Federal Government

A Candid Survey of Federal Executives

Underwritten By

Deloitte.

About the Government Business Council (GBC)

The research intelligence division

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Media Group (GEMG)

Dedicated to advancing the
business of government
through analysis, insight and
analytical independence

Extension of GEMG's 40 years of
editorial standards and ethical values

GBC studies influential decision-makers to
produce intelligence-based analysis



Departments and Agencies Represented*



Department of the Army
Department of Veterans Affairs
Department of Defense
Department of Treasury
Department of the Navy
Department of the Air Force
Department of Homeland Security
Department of Health and Human Services
Department of Agriculture
Environmental Protection Agency
General Services Administration
Department of Justice
Department of Transportation
Social Security Administration
Department of Commerce
Department of Labor
United States Postal Service

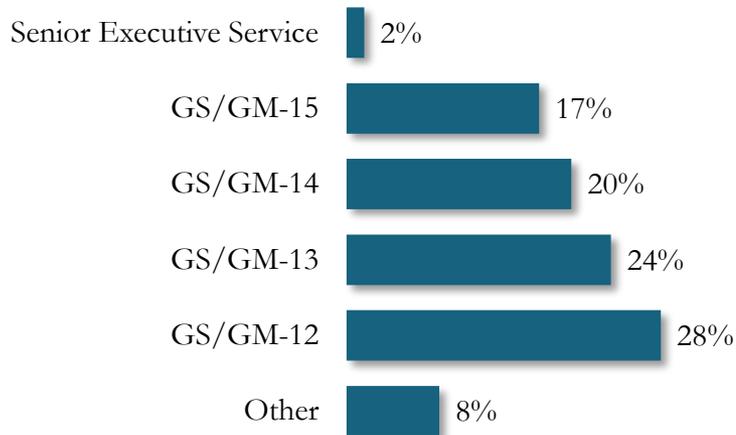
Department of Energy
Department of Housing and Urban Development
Department of the Interior
Department of State
National Aeronautics and Space Administration
Small Business Administration
Department of Education
Congress/Legislative Branch
Office of Personnel Management
Executive Office of the President (including OMB)
National Science Foundation
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
United States Agency for International Development
Government Accountability Office
United States Marine Corps

*Agencies listed in order of frequency

Respondent Profile

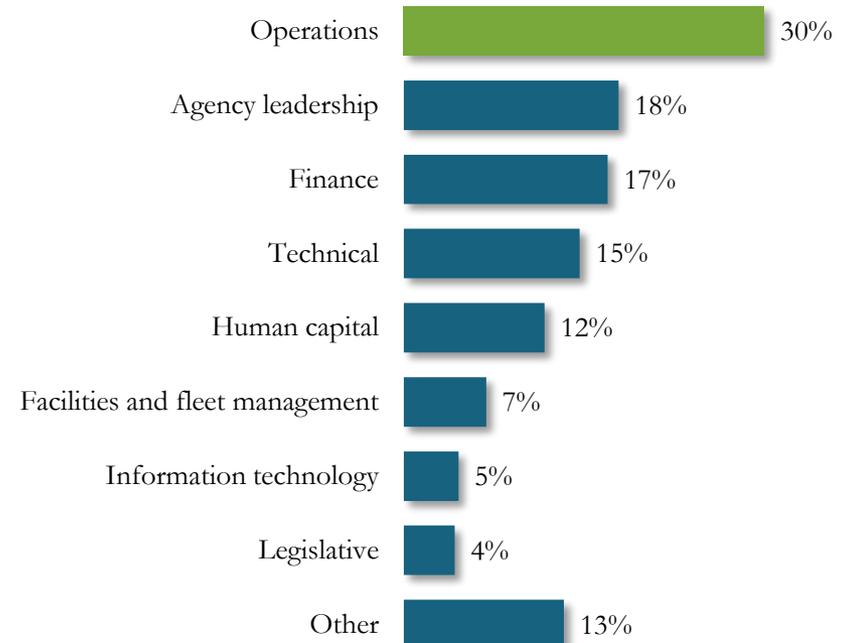
Job Grade/Rank

n=310



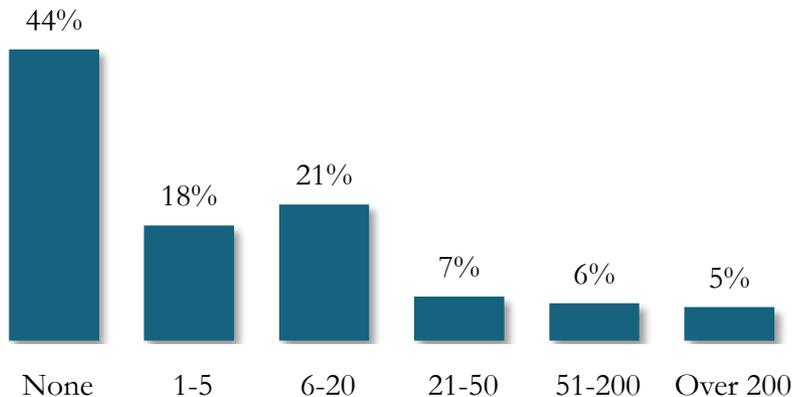
Areas of Responsibility

n=310



Number of People Overseen

n=314



The survey was sent by email in June 2010 to a sample of federal executives who were randomly selected from *Government Executive's* subscriber database. A total of 310 federal decision makers, representing civilian and defense agencies, completed the survey.

Executive Summary

- Almost all federal executives (86 percent) say that a primary force driving them to be more sustainable is a sense of obligation. Many also behave more sustainably to save money, while far fewer do so to follow a trend, or because of social pressure.
- Federal executives surveyed have taken significant steps to “go green” in their personal lives. A strong majority (81 percent) say they now turn off lights when not in use. Almost as many print less, turn off electronics, use more energy efficient products, or recycle.
- Federal executives believe they have a responsibility to promote sustainability in their agency as well. Nine in ten of those surveyed agree with the idea that they have such a responsibility. Nearly as many of them say that they have personally taken action to promote sustainability.
- Respondents almost universally agree that it is important that their agency implements sustainable practices. Over 95 percent call it very or somewhat important. When presented with a list of three elements of sustainability and asked to rank their importance, most viewed all three as critical.
- While a “sense of obligation” is the top reason for going green on a personal level, it ranks fourth among reasons agencies make changes. Agencies’ moves towards sustainability tend to result from different motivators including fulfilling a mandate or reducing costs.
- Almost all respondents believe it is important to increase sustainability, but most report their agency has taken few actions to do so. In fact, on average, those surveyed know of less than three things their agency has done.
- Many respondents believe the level of effort and resources put towards sustainability by their agency is lacking. Over half of them call the sustainability effort “inadequate.” In contrast, four percent say the effort has been “excessive.”
- Many of the roadblocks to sustainability are strategic or cultural. Over a quarter say that sustainability is not an agency priority, or that there is a lack of coordination. Almost as many claim there is a lack of involvement, enthusiasm, and engagement in “going green” among agency employees.
- Respondents recognize ways in which their agencies could become more sustainable. Almost 60 percent say that better education, training, and engagement can help their agency implement more sustainable practices.
- A majority (54 percent) of respondents anticipate the level of effort put towards sustainability will remain constant. A significant portion (39 percent) anticipate their agency will be more dedicated to sustainability in the future, while almost none expect that their agency will be less committed to it.

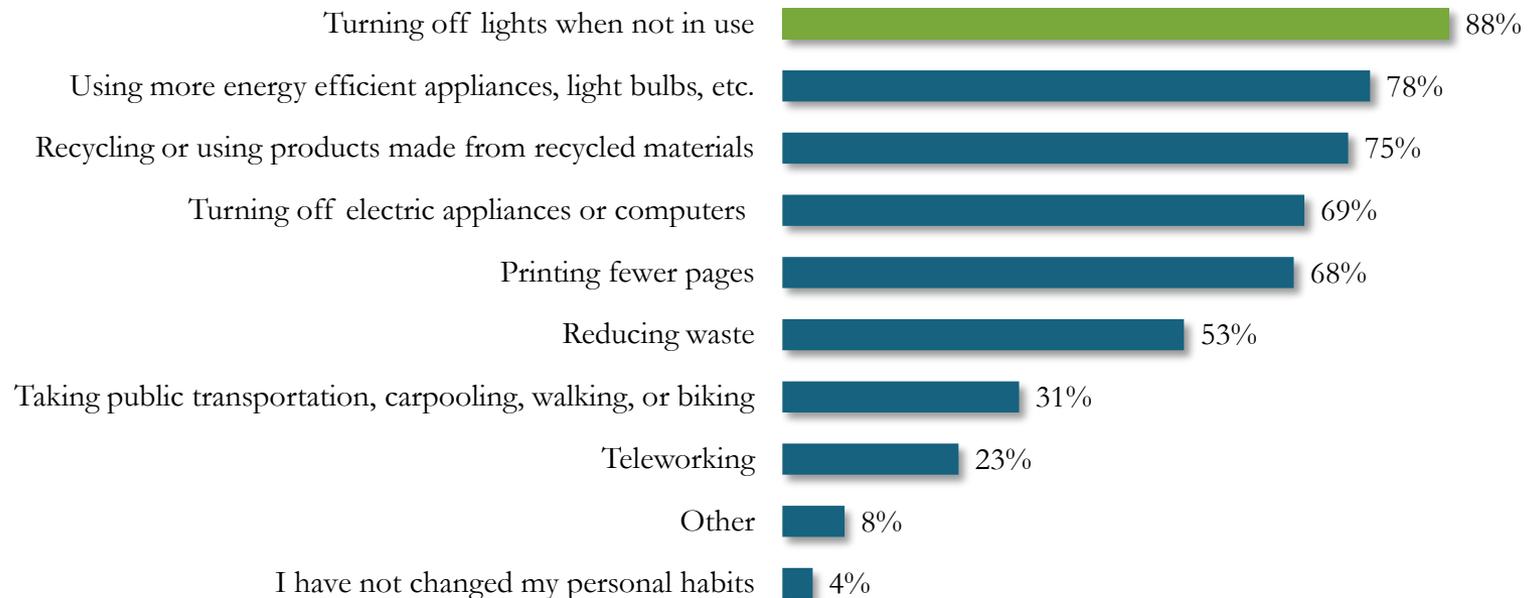
RESEARCH FINDINGS

Federal Executives Are “Going Green” In Their Personal Lives

- In late 2009, President Obama issued an executive order aiming “to establish an integrated strategy towards sustainability in the Federal Government and to make reduction of greenhouse gas emissions a priority for federal agencies.”¹ While achieving these goals in the public sector has not been easy, federal executives surveyed are certainly taking steps to “go green” in their personal lives.
- A strong majority (81 percent) say they now turn off lights when not in use. Almost as many respondents print less, turn off electronics, use more energy efficient products, or recycle. In an optional comment section, several respondents discussed the lengths to which they have gone including “buying used products” or even “moving closer to work.” Many respondents explained that their sustainable behavior is not a new change – they have been doing it all along.

Changes Made to Personal Habits

(Percentage of respondents, n=377)



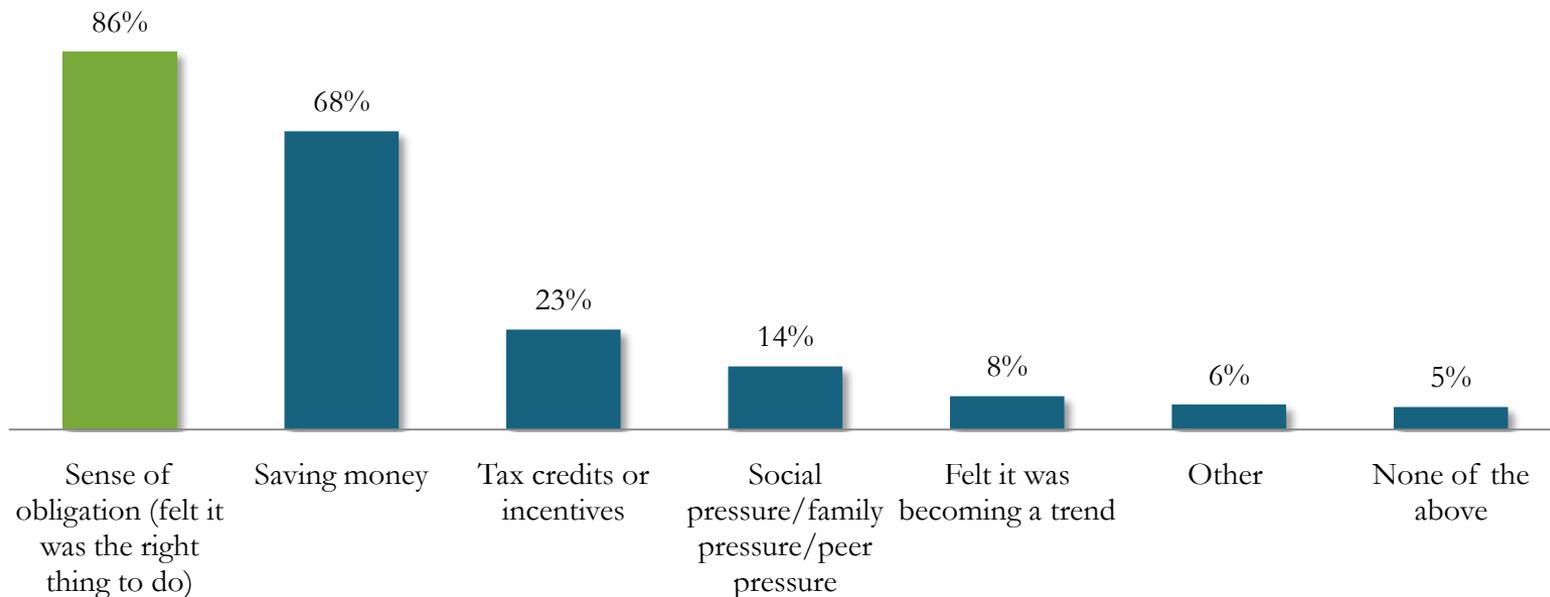
¹Executive Order 13514, Issued October 8, 2009

Sustainable Behavior Driven by A Sense of Obligation

- Federal Executives are behaving sustainably in their personal lives because they feel it is the right thing to do. Almost all respondents (86 percent) say that a primary force driving them to be more sustainable is a “sense of obligation.”
- About 68 percent acknowledge that they behave more sustainably in order to save money, and 23 percent cite tax credits as an driving force. Far fewer respondents claim to have changed their behavior in order to follow a trend, or because of social pressure.
- One federal executive commented that his behavior changed after “he received more sustainability information” while another said that once “understanding the wastefulness and having an alternative” he decided to act more sustainably.

Reasons for Behaving Sustainably

(Percentage of respondents, n=369)



Federal Executives Take Action To Make Their Agency More Sustainable

- In addition to incorporating sustainable practices in their personal lives, respondents believe that they have a responsibility to promote sustainability in their agency. Half of those surveyed “strongly agree” with the idea that they have such a responsibility, while 40 percent say that they “somewhat” agree.
- Nearly as many respondents go a step further, saying they have personally taken action to promote sustainability. Almost nine in ten respondents agree they have done so.
- Some of those who say they have not been able to promote sustainability claim to be powerless to affect change. In an optional elaboration section, several report that they are limited by agency rules or hindered by the fact that agency management and leadership do not listen to their ideas.

Actions and Responsibility for Agency Sustainability

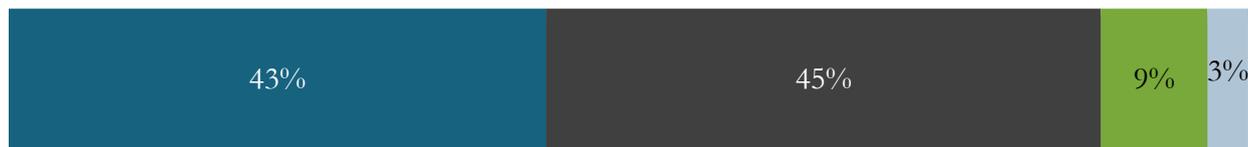
(Percentage of respondents, n=362)

■ Strongly agree ■ Somewhat agree ■ Somewhat disagree ■ Strongly disagree

I have a personal responsibility to promote sustainability in my agency.



I have personally done things to promote sustainability in my agency.

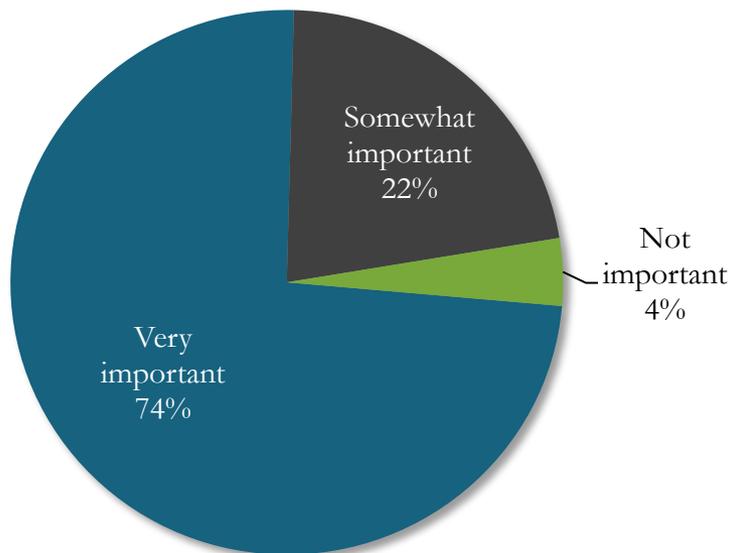


Core Elements of Sustainability All Considered Important by Federal Executives

- Federal executives surveyed almost universally agree on the importance of their agency implementing sustainable practices. Over 95 percent call it “very” or “somewhat important,” while only a handful call such practices “not important.”
- When presented with a list of three elements of sustainability and asked to rank their importance, most viewed all three as critical. Eight in ten federal executives surveyed say reducing energy consumption is “very important” and an additional 16 percent call it “somewhat important.”
- Respondents believe that reducing emissions and transitioning to alternative energy are similarly necessary – about three quarters of respondents consider those initiatives “very important,” while only four percent call each “not important.”

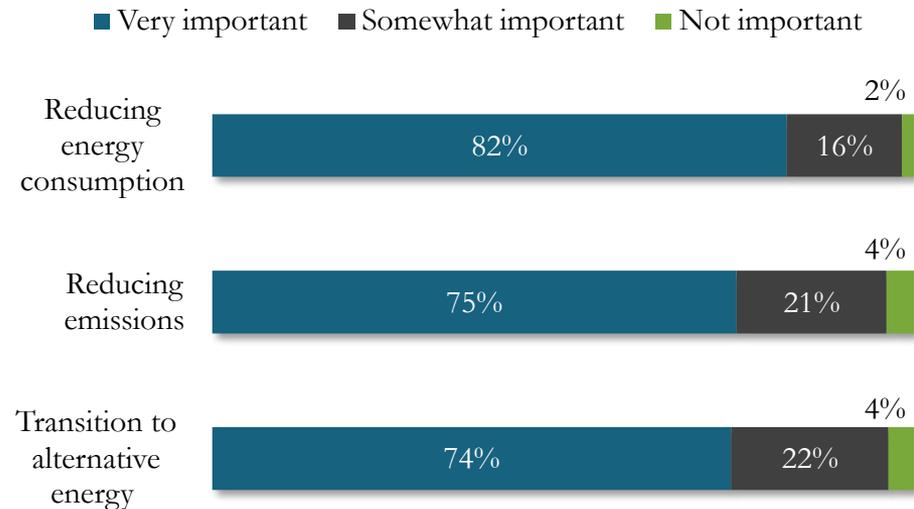
Importance of Implementing Sustainability

(Percentage of respondents, n=363)



Importance of Elements of Sustainability

(Percentage of respondents, n=363)

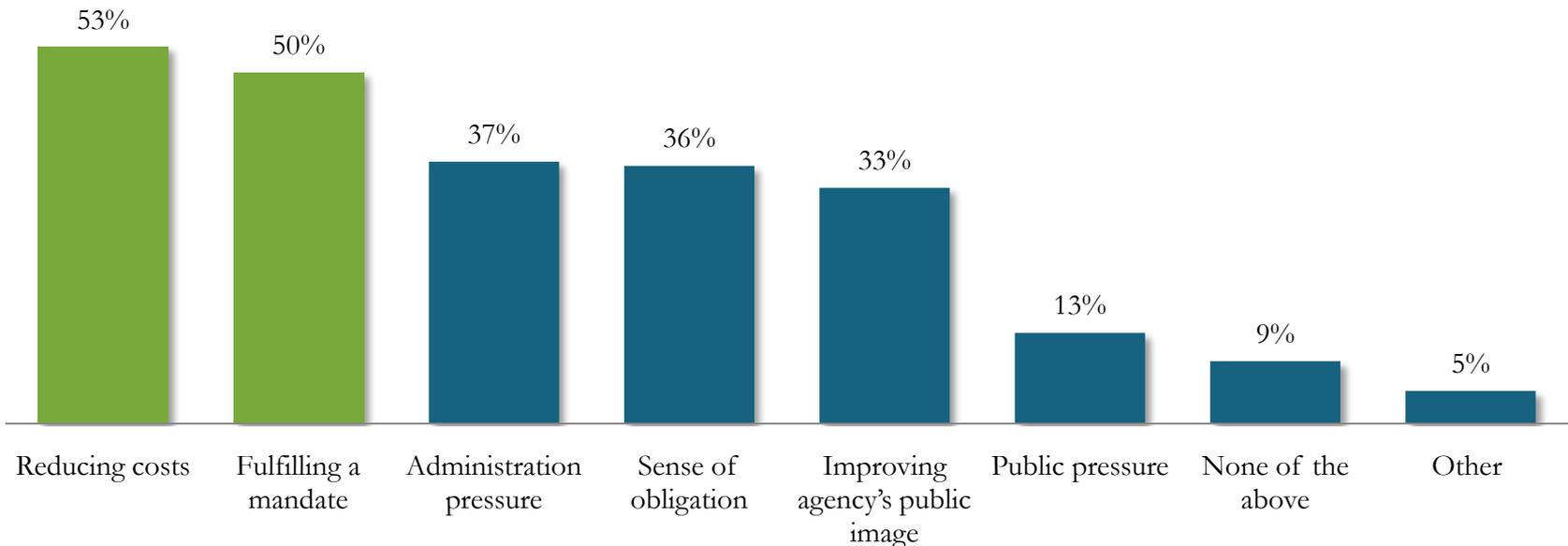


Agency Sustainability Initiatives Aim to Reduce Costs and Meet a Mandate

- While a “sense of obligation” is the top reason for going green on a personal level, it ranks fourth among reasons agencies make changes. Just over one-third of respondents (36 percent) say it is a key reason for the initiatives their agency has taken, compared to 86 percent who say it has driven personal action. Agencies’ moves towards sustainability tend to result from different motivators.
- According to respondents, the top reason agencies promote sustainability is to reduce costs (53 percent). Half also say their agency has engaged in sustainability initiatives in order to fulfill a mandate.
- Administration pressure (37 percent) is significantly more likely to drive agency action than public pressure (13 percent).

Reasons for Agency Action to Increase Sustainability

(Percentage of respondents, n=351)

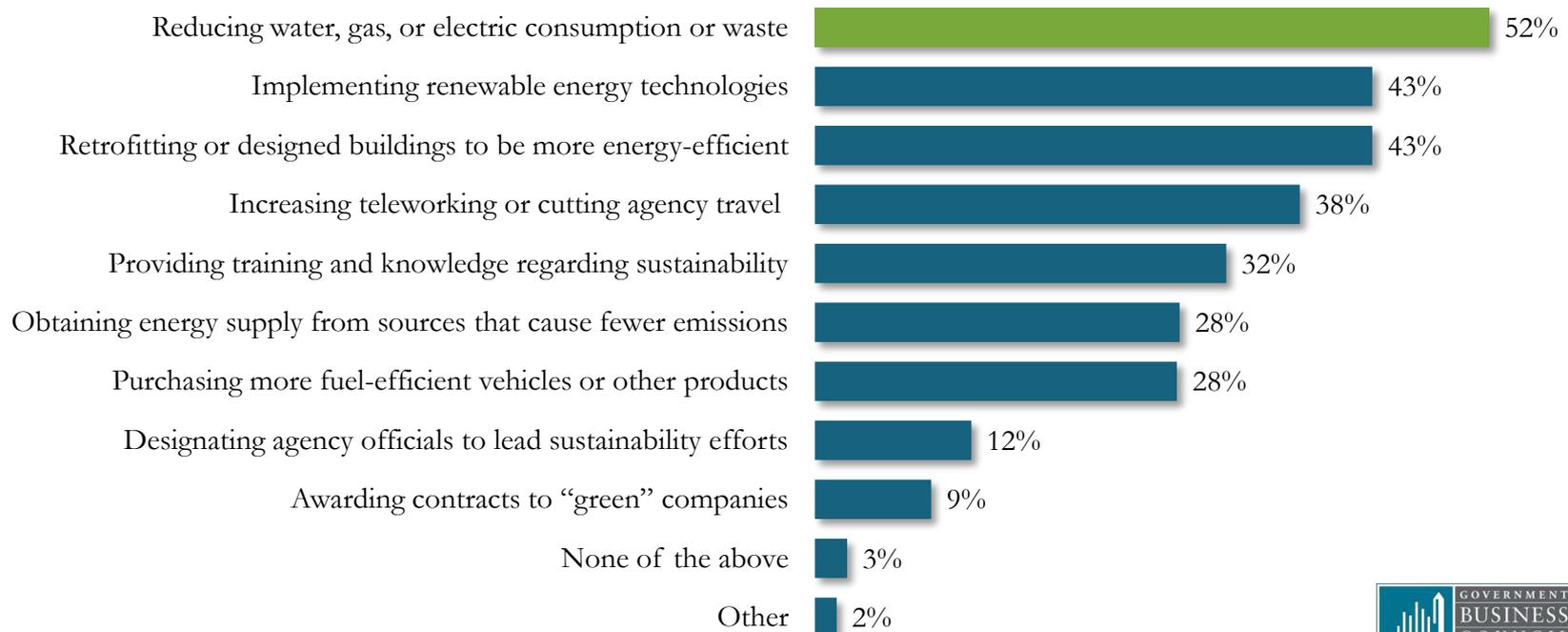


Reducing Consumption and Waste is The Top Sustainability Goal

- Sustainability efforts can comprise a wide variety of actions and federal executives believe several of these are especially important to achieve.
- More than half of respondents (52 percent) identify reducing waste or consumption as among the top three goals.
- A significant portion also believe retrofitting buildings to be more energy-efficient and implementing new energy technologies is critical. On the other hand, few feel that designating a sustainability leader and awarding contracts to green companies is important for achieving greater sustainability.
- Several respondents who selected “providing training and knowledge” commented that they felt such training was critical. They believe ensuring a wide variety of agency employees are involved is a necessary basis for success in other areas.

Most Important Sustainability Related Goals*

(Percentage of respondents, n=355)

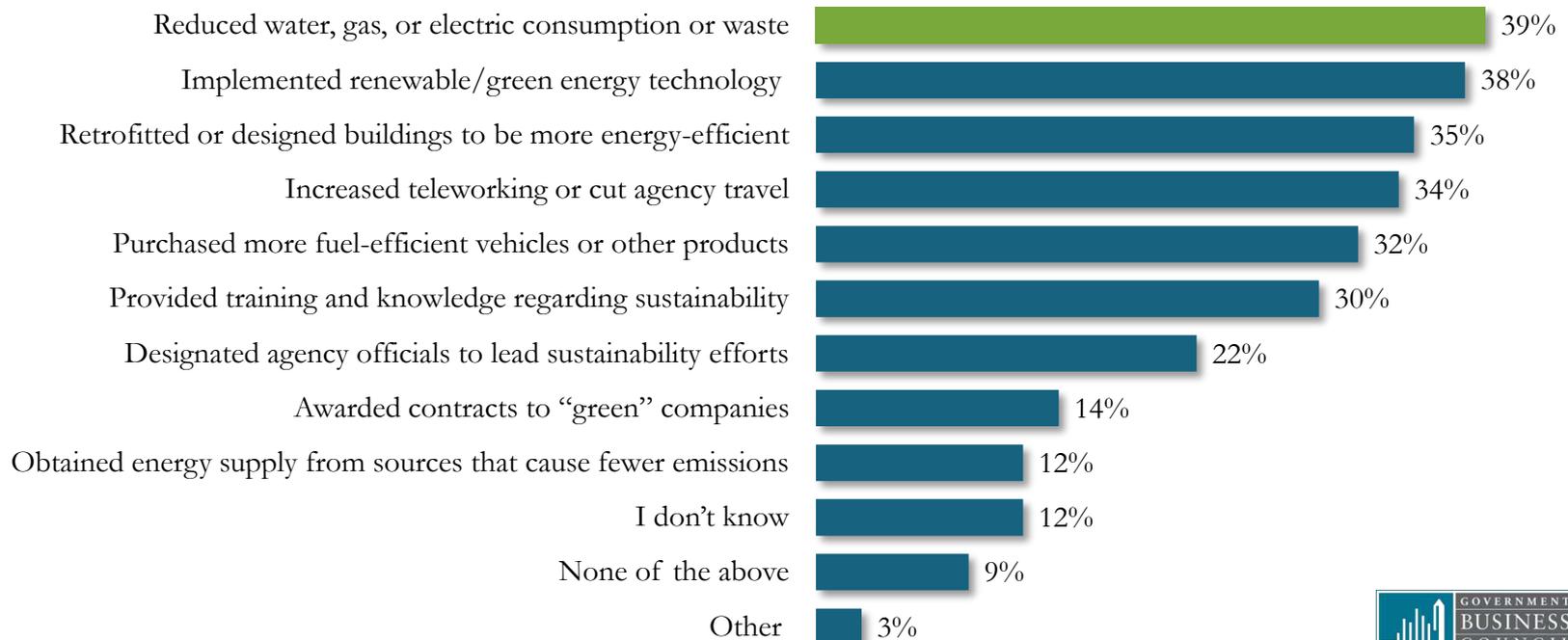


*Respondents were able to select up to three choices.

Agencies Have not Taken Many Key Actions to Improve Sustainability

- Almost all respondents believe it is important to increase sustainability, but most federal executives surveyed report their agency has taken few actions to do so. In fact, respondents know an average of just 2.7 sustainability-related actions taken by their agency.
- Respondents were most likely to report their agency has reduced consumption and waste (39 percent) – an initiative also most frequently cited as a top goal. About as many say their agency has implemented green technologies (38 percent) or retrofitted buildings to be more efficient (35 percent).
- Over 20 percent of respondents report their agency has taken none of the actions listed, or don't know what their agency has done.

Actions Taken by Agency
(Percentage of respondents, n=335)

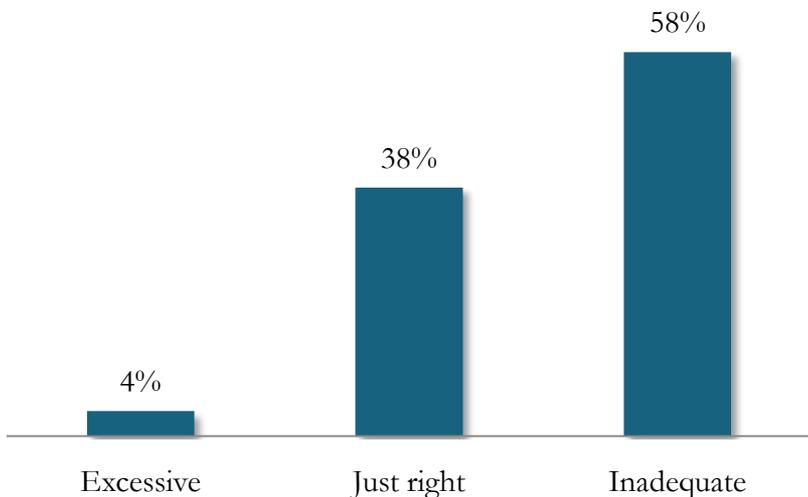


Federal Executives Say Agencies Have Not Done Enough to Promote Sustainability

- Many respondents believe the level of effort and resources put towards sustainability by their agency is lacking. Over half of them called their agency's effort "inadequate." In contrast, four percent of respondents say the effort has been "excessive."
- Federal executives gave mixed responses when they were asked to grade their agency. About one in three find that their agency's progress is "acceptable," while nearly as many called it "lacking." Just one in four respondents called their agency's progress "good." A very small minority report that their agency is doing either "outstanding" or "terrible."
- Respondents are even more critical when asked the same question regarding the federal government. Over half called the government's progress either "lacking" or "terrible."

Categorization of Agency Effort

(Percentage of Respondents, n=341)



Sustainability Grades

(Percentage of respondents, n=338)

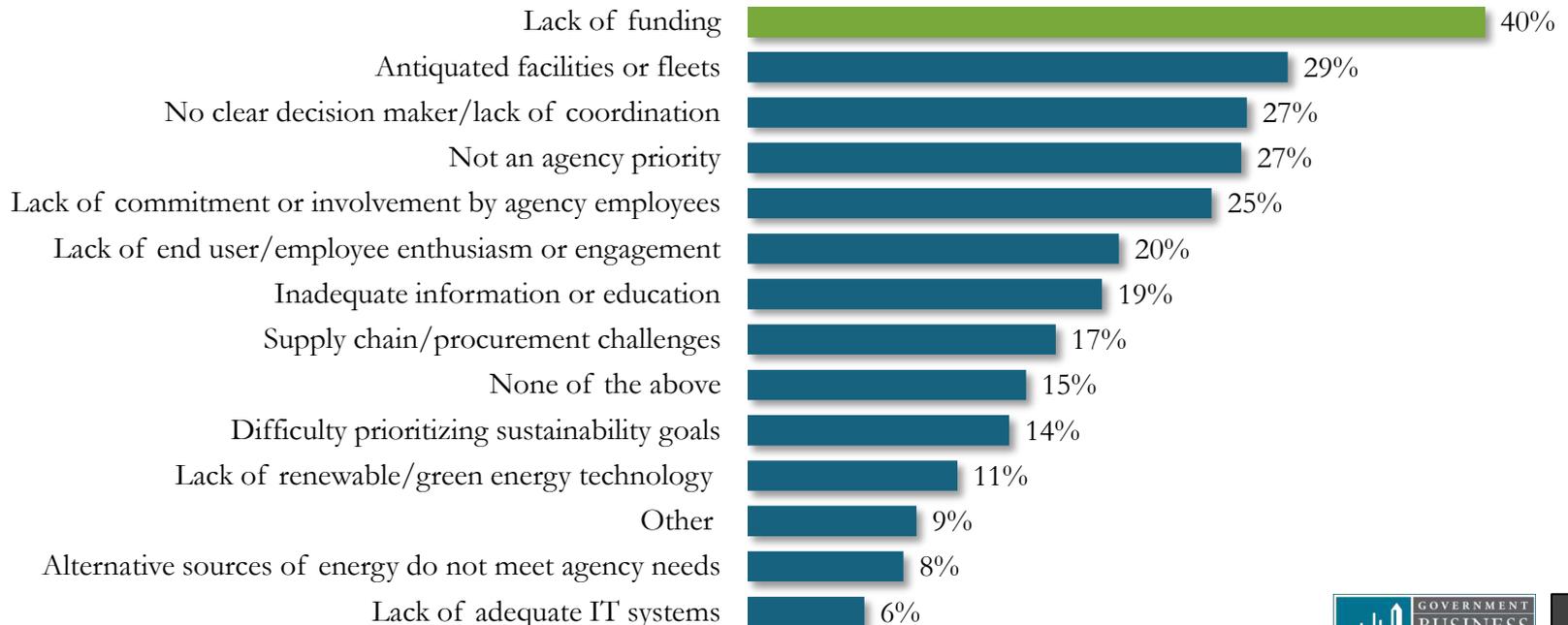


Lack of Funding Is Largest Obstacle to Sustainability; Other Technical and Cultural Issues Also Stand in the Way

- With so little action taken to make government sustainable, understanding obstacles standing in the way is critical. The most common challenge federal executives think their agencies face is a lack of funding, cited by four in ten respondents. Almost 30 percent also believe antiquated facilities are an obstacle.
- Many of the roadblocks to sustainability are strategic or cultural. Over a quarter say that sustainability is not an agency priority, or that there is a lack of coordination. Almost as many claim there is a lack of involvement, enthusiasm, and engagement in “going green” among agency employees. This contrasts with the extent respondents are engaged in sustainable practices in their personal lives.
- One federal executive wrote that “there are so many issues to address, its difficult to focus on a manageable subset.”

Obstacles to Sustainability

(Percentage of respondents, n=320)



A More Engaged Workforce and Better Training Can Help Achieve Sustainability Goals

- In spite of the obstacles to sustainability, respondents recognize that certain changes can help. Almost 60 percent think that better education, training, and engagement can lead to more sustainable practices in their agency. About half also say that clearer goals and a better strategy are necessary.
- According to 47 percent of respondents, increased funding is necessary for improved sustainability. In fact, even more respondents believe funding could help than originally cited a lack of funds as an obstacle.
- Resources such as improved metrics and greater accountability are selected by a relatively smaller, but still significant portion of federal executives as tools that would aid in helping their agency “go green.”

Resources Necessary for Improved Sustainability

(Percentage of respondents, n=315)



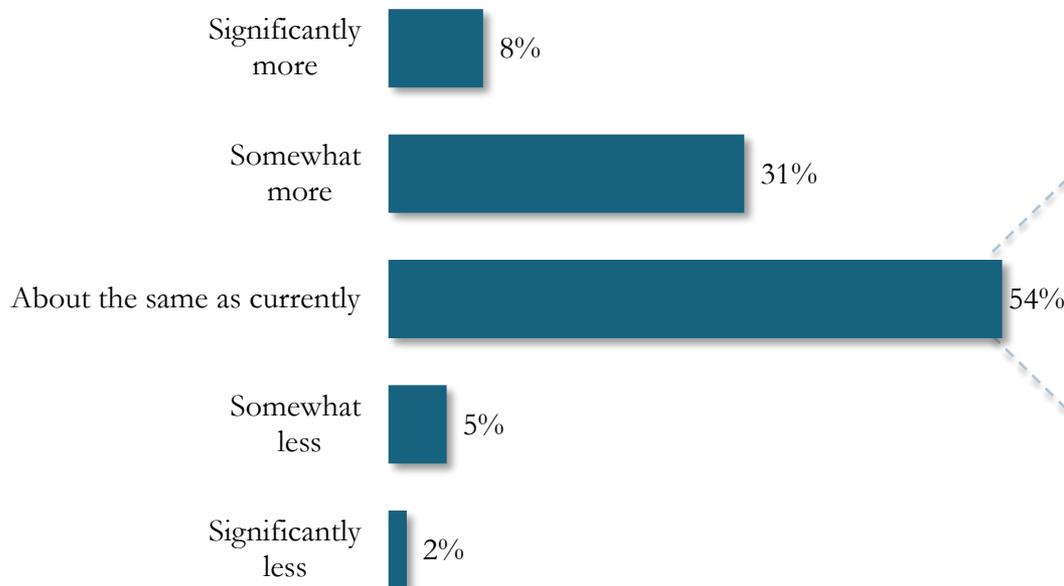
“We need more communication to secure commitment to the challenge of improving sustainability. Our people care and will commit.”

Federal Executives Expect The Same or More Effort to be Put Towards Sustainability

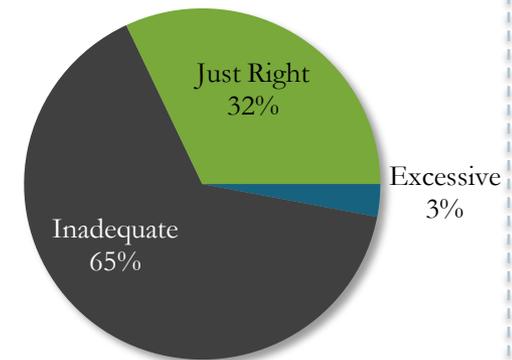
- Almost none of the federal executives who responded to the survey anticipate their agency will put forth less effort towards sustainability in the future. On the other hand, 39 percent anticipate their agency will be significantly or somewhat more dedicated to sustainability.
- A majority (54 percent) of respondents anticipate the level of effort put towards sustainability will remain constant. That is not to say they believe the current level is sufficient. In fact, 65 percent of those who don't expect their agency to do more or less in the future, say their agency isn't doing enough right now. Just 32 percent of this group say the constant level of effort in the future is "just right."

Future Effort Anticipated Regarding Sustainability

(Percentage of respondents, n=314)



Categorization of Current Agency Effort
(Percentage of respondents saying agency effort will remain the same, n=170)



Contact

Bryan Klopack

Director of Research

Tel 202.266.7122

bklopack@govexec.com

<http://www.govexec.com/GBC>

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