

GETTING STARTED WITH SUSTAINABILITY

Green management begins with careful evaluation



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OK, YOU'VE GOTTEN ON BOARD AND HAVE DECIDED IT'S TIME TO ENHANCE YOUR PORTFOLIO'S SUSTAINABILITY. NOW THE QUESTION IS, WHERE DO YOU START, GIVEN THESE ECONOMICALLY CHALLENGING TIMES?

Deliver a message to senior property management executives focusing on the superior service level that your firm can provide to clients by improving their properties' sustainability, and how this will improve your firm's competitive position and increase your market share. With their commitment to a program and strategy for green real estate management, your company will leverage economies of scale by working across your management portfolio.

Additionally, you can share with owners that more sustainable operations will make income-producing properties more competitive, given the current market demands for green space. It will also allow the firm to stay ahead of future carbon emissions legislation. Use the information strategically to make the case for a sustainability program. Remember, studies have shown that better energy management is a proxy for better overall property management practices and is the cornerstone of any successful green initiative.

For both your company executives and the building owners, be prepared to answer questions and doubts. Owners are likely to raise concerns about the costs and time associated with "greening" their properties. So, remain confident and steadfast with your responses, and stress that by combining best practices and low-cost upgrades, any building can be greener and

demonstrate increased income and enhanced value. It will also help your case if you're able to provide supporting literature, case studies and an easy-to-understand first-blush cost/benefit analysis of a few initiatives to consider.

Once you have received the go-ahead to go green, the next major undertaking is to understand where you are today. Establish a baseline of performance for all the components of building and portfolio operations and business decisions that affect your environmental footprint. Measure and quantify energy usage, water consumption, waste production and recycling at your properties. Evaluate the equipment and systems in place, along with standard operating procedures, purchasing policies, investment criteria for capital projects, tenant communications and tenant improvements to better understand all current practices that will affect your green initiative.

When it's time for this first self-assessment, you have a lot of questions to ask—what are all the steps you're taking to enhance sustainability? Which areas are under your control, versus the control of building occupants? What environmental and financial benefits can you tap into or create at little or no cost? As you begin to answer these questions and review the data you've collected, your case for enhancing sustainability becomes much more realistic and achievable.

The results of this assessment will start to reveal ideas for where to start and help you identify the priorities that are important to your portfolio. Stay tuned for additional columns, which will show you how to implement improvements in these areas after you've developed a baseline. ■