

Allegheny County
Department of Human Services
One Smithfield Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Phone: 412.350.5701
Fax: 412.350.4004
www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs

GREENING DHS: THE 2008 LOCAL GOVERNMENT CASE COMPETITION

Prepared by: Erin Dalton, Dana Kunzman, Katie Meehan, and Emily Sturman

RESEARCH REPORT



Contributors

Many individuals assisted in the planning and execution of the 2008 Local Government Case Competition. The Department of Human Services would particularly like to acknowledge the contributions of the competition's judges and staff support.

Judges:

- **Randy Brockington**, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **Keith Caldwell**, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work
- **Carolyn Galvin**, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **Court Gould**, Sustainable Pittsburgh
- **Sue Gove**, Gove Group, Inc.
- **Lareese Hall**, City of Pittsburgh Arts Commission
- **Kevin Jenkins**, The Pittsburgh Foundation
- **Mark Jones**, Office of the Allegheny County Executive
- **Barbara Kline**, 2007 competition winner
- **Alex Lackner**, Concurrent Technologies Corp.
- **Vivien Luk**, The Forbes Funds
- **Jonathan McKain**, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **Ebony Robinson**, 2007 competition winner
- **Tracy Soska**, University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work
- **Bob Stumpp**, Allegheny County Department of Human Services
- **Claire Walker**, Pittsburgh Child Guidance Foundation
- **Susan White**, Hillman Foundation

Department of Human Services Staff:

- Randy Aussenberg
- Yvonne Bonner
- Erin Dalton
- Lisa Engle
- Ben Gurga
- William Jubeck
- Chuck Keenan
- Dana Kunzman
- Terry Lane
- Katie Meehan
- Emily Sturman
- Sandra Weber

Contents

Introduction	.....1
Background	.....2
Why a Case Competition?	.....2
The Participants: Students and Judges	.....2
The Case: A Greener DHS	.....3
Managing the Competition	.....4
Case Findings	.....5
Students' Ideas for a Greener DHS	.....5
Short-term Goals and Ideas	.....5
Mid-term Goals and Ideas	.....6
Long-term Goals and Ideas	.....8
Strategies for DHS Stakeholders	.....9
Clients	.....9
Community	.....9
Service Providers	.....11
Employees	.....12
Strategies for Implementation and Evaluation	.....12
Implementation	.....12
Evaluation	.....13
Competition Evaluation	.....14
Student Feedback	.....14
Judge Feedback	.....16
Conclusions and Next Steps	.....17
Appendix A: Participant Feedback	.....17

Introduction

INTRODUCTION

In November 2008, the Allegheny County Department of Human Services (DHS) sponsored its second annual Local Government Case Competition with the generous support of the Human Services Integration Fund. The event was successful in engaging and fostering positive relationships with local graduate students while eliciting their creative and analytical ideas about a timely issue facing local government. Specifically, the Local Government Case Competition sought to:

1. Engage graduate students in local environmental and government issues (especially human services);
2. Encourage graduate students to consider employment opportunities with DHS;
3. Utilize local student talent to provide DHS with provocative ideas about making the Department more environmentally sustainable;
4. Build relationships among local graduate students;
5. Open communications between the competition's judges and student participants; and
6. Allow students to practice what they are learning in a supportive atmosphere.

Background

WHY A CASE COMPETITION?

The Department of Human Services held its first Local Government Case Competition in 2007 as a way to engage students in the celebration of DHS' 10-year anniversary as an integrated department. The competition also served as an opportunity to elicit the creativity and knowledge of these local graduate students: participants in the 2007 competition were charged with envisioning DHS as it would, or should, look on its 20-year anniversary, 10 years hence.

One of the common themes that emerged from the 2007 competition was “greening” – students asserted that over the next 10 years DHS would embrace the principles of environmental sustainability and become a more environmentally friendly organization. The 2008 case competition expanded this idea and sought ideas from students on how to embed environmental sustainability into DHS' policies and operations. Competing teams worked to solve a real problem under simulated business conditions (e.g. time deadlines and incomplete information) to formulate workable, action-oriented recommendations. Student teams presented their results to judging panels comprising community stakeholders and DHS staff.

THE PARTICIPANTS – STUDENTS AND JUDGES

Forty-six graduate students, divided among 12 teams, participated in the case competition. Participants included students from four local universities and eight programs of study:

- 14 University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work (SSW) students;
- 2 University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public and International Affairs (GSPIA) students;
- 1 dual degree student at the University of Pittsburgh School of Social Work and Graduate School of Public and International Affairs;
- 4 University of Pittsburgh School of Law students;
- 1 University of Pittsburgh Katz Graduate School of Business (Katz) student;
- 2 University of Pittsburgh Graduate School of Public Health (GSPH) students;
- 18 Carnegie Mellon University Heinz School of Public Policy and Management (Heinz) students;
- 2 Duquesne University Social and Public Policy students; and
- 2 Point Park University Graduate School of Business students.

Background

The 2008 competition drew participants from a broader range of schools than the 2007 competition, which included students from only two schools and three areas of study.

Students were divided into interdisciplinary teams based on their academic program and demographic factors like race, age, and gender. A demographic profile of the 2008 competition's participants is listed below:

- Age: Students ranged in age from 22 to 46 years old.
- Gender: 35 women and 11 men participated.
- Race:
 - Caucasian: 61%
 - African-American/Black: 13%
 - Asian/Pacific-Islander: 13%
 - Latino: 4%
 - Biracial: 2%
 - Multiracial: 2%

The 2008 competition was judged by 18 individuals, representing community organizations (5), local universities (2), and foundations (3); six DHS staff members and two winners from the 2007 competition also served as judges. An additional 13 DHS staff members handled logistics and planning, ensuring that the event went smoothly.

THE CASE: A GREENER DHS

The challenge for the competition participants was presented in the opening night session as follows:

“Allegheny County Executive, Dan Onorato, has issued a county-wide mandate to ‘embed environmental sustainability throughout its policymaking and operational processes’ – in other words, to make the policies and operations of municipal government more environmentally sustainable. As a department within county government, DHS must comply with this mandate.

“Create a plan for DHS’ compliance with this mandate. This mandate will affect many different stakeholders – employees and administrators, DHS clients, service providers, community members, and more – so your plan should address ways in which each of these groups can participate in making DHS more environmentally sustainable. The plan should incorporate some of the ‘best practices’ of environmental sustainability; however, it must still reflect the unique values and culture of DHS.”

Background

Important considerations:

- Expectations for staff and contracted providers
- Short- and long-term priorities
- Priorities should take into account limited resources (financial, human capital, etc.)
- Barriers and risks associated with your plan
- How to manage this change
- How to ensure compliance and buy-in
- Evaluation and measuring success

Participants were judged on the following criteria:

- Verbal presentation
- Technical presentation
- Overall impression of presentation
- Scope of presentation
- Team performance during question and answer portion
- Team demeanor

MANAGING THE COMPETITION

DHS kicked off the Case Competition during a catered evening reception held on Thursday, November 13 at the Human Services Building (One Smithfield Street, downtown Pittsburgh). At that time, DHS staff members introduced the case, announced the pre-assigned teams, and answered questions. Each student received a USB/Flash drive loaded with important case materials; these drives also included background information on DHS and promotional materials for internships and other opportunities at the Department. After the assignments were announced, students met in their teams and developed a “game plan” for the following 36 hours. Teams had all of Friday to independently conduct their research and planning. At 8:00 a.m. on Saturday morning, teams reconvened at the Pittsburgh Athletic Association in Oakland to turn in electronic and hard copies of their presentations and to enjoy a catered continental breakfast before presenting to the judges.

Teams presented their findings to judging panels composed of six judges; each of the three judging panels heard four team presentations. After all the initial presentations were conducted, each panel nominated one team to proceed to the final round. The finalist teams were announced after lunch and presented with a case “twist,” which charged them with modifying their plan for DHS to include the broader principles of sustainability, including responsible economic growth, job creation, and social justice. Finalist teams had 45 minutes to prepare a modified version of their presentation before they went before the full judging panel. After all the finalist teams presented, the 18 judges deliberated behind closed doors and selected the first-, second-, and third-place winners, who won cash prizes of \$3,000, \$1,500, and \$500, respectively.

Background

In their evaluation surveys submitted after the competition, students reported that they spent between eight and 20 hours working on the case. Teams advancing to the finals of the competition reported that they spent between 12 and 20 hours working on the case.

Case Findings

STUDENTS' IDEAS FOR A GREENER DHS

Each team presented their findings and ideas in unique ways; however, several common themes emerged. For the purposes of this report, these ideas are summarized in three major categories: short-, mid-, and long- term plans; strategies for DHS stakeholders; and strategies for implementation and evaluation. Most of the language used in this section is taken directly from students' presentations without specific student or team attribution.

Short-, Mid-, and Long-term Plans

Short-term Goals and Ideas


Many teams focused on short-term changes that could make an immediate impact on DHS, initiate the process of effecting long-term change, and engage employees in improving the environmental practices of DHS. Students believed that in the short-term, DHS should:

- Focus on employees first:
 - o Train employees on green practices and teach how to implement them at DHS
 - o Provide incentives for alternate transportation and other green practices – at work and at home
 - o Inspire employees to adopt green practices and help them bring the movement to their clients
- Make immediate changes in resource/energy use and energy efficiency:
 - o Recycle paper, cans, plastic;
 - o Default computers to sleep mode;
 - o Default to duplex printing;
 - o Install energy efficient light bulbs;
 - o Install dimmer switches on lights;
 - o Provide reusable utensils and mugs;
 - o Install water coolers instead of vending machines;
 - o Implement recycling compliance initiatives; and
 - o Include phrases like “Think before you print” in email signatures.

Case Findings

- • •
- Begin exploring organizational changes that will embed environmental sustainability in DHS' policies and procedures:
 - Increase partnerships with organizations that incorporate sustainability as part of their bylaws or culture;
 - Increase awareness of sustainable practices among DHS clients;
 - Appoint sustainability liaisons from each office to work on green initiatives in and out of DHS; and
 - Establish contracting procedures that favor "green" organizations.

The following represent some ideas students had for the short-term:



Day-To-Day at DHS

- **Recycling:**
 - Multiple and separate bins on every floor by trash cans
 - Print on recycled paper, double-sided
 - Recycle ink + toner cartridges
 - Buy remanufactured ink + toner cartridges
- **Computers:**
 - Default to "sleep" mode



Day-To-Day at DHS

- **Food:**
 - Replace water bottle vending with water coolers- use own cups
 - Replace paper coffee filters with metal ones
 - Buy Direct: Fair Trade, Organic Coffee and snacks
 - Keep silverware and plates instead of using plastic ware and Styrofoam
- **Cleaning & Supplies**
 - Green cleaning supplies
 - Sustainable, recycled, eco-friendly office supplies



Short Term Goals

- Empower DHS employees to see themselves as stewards of their environment
- Reorient practices and procedures around sustainability
- Increase partnerships with organizations who incorporate sustainability as part of their bylaws or culture
- Increase awareness of sustainability practices among DHS clients

Dedicated to Healthy Sustainability

Mid-term Goals and Ideas

Teams outlined numerous mid-term goals and strategies, including community outreach, continued focus on employees, research and benchmarking, and continued implementation of eco-friendly practices. These mid-term ideas were designed to continue taking small steps toward environmental sustainability while planning for more comprehensive, long-term change. Students asserted that in the mid-term, DHS should:

Case Findings

•••

- Maintain focus on employees:
 - Implement a four-day work week;
 - Provide assistance for arranging carpools;
 - Conduct focus groups to elicit employees' ideas and goals; and
 - Have employees develop personal sustainability goals.
- Engage a Sustainability Manager and/or Sustainability Council to coordinate, monitor, and evaluate environmental practices at DHS and in the community. This individual or council would:
 - Administer and oversee implementation of environmentally sound practices in the operations and policy-making of DHS;
 - Act as a one-point source of information and guidance on environmental practices to all stakeholders (employees, service providers, clients, and the community);
 - Mediate and broker community relations between stakeholders;
 - Monitor sustainability goals;
 - Lead a task force chaired by leaders from each office within DHS;
 - Work with "green teams" from each DHS office; and
 - Evaluate and review the impact programs have on Allegheny County.
- Research and benchmark:
 - Examine other greening efforts nationwide to determine best practices, goals and targets, and innovative ideas that could be applied to DHS.
- Continue eco-friendly updates to facilities and practices; implement green computing practices.
- Begin community outreach.

Medium and Long-term Goals

- Switch over to hybrid vehicles
 - Secure grant money to provide employees with monetary incentives to buy their own hybrid cars to use when driving to work
- Continue energy auditing through Utility Manager Pro
 - Transition to 100% low flow toilets and fixtures
 - Consider possibility of alternate energy

DHS Director of Sustainability

- Heads up task force consisting of chairs of different offices of DHS
- Monitors achievement of sustainability goals throughout DHS and coordinates departmental competition for waste reduction
- Organizes community conservation project
- Implements county mandate to DHS stakeholders

Step 1: The EPC

- Role: The Environmental Practices Committee (EPC) will perform four major functions:
 - Administer and oversee implementation of Environmentally Sound Practices (ESP) in the operations and policy-making of the DHS
 - Act as one-point source of information and guidance on ESPs to stakeholders
 - Mediate and broker sustainability relations between stakeholders
 - Evaluate and review program's impact on Allegheny County

Case Findings

Long-term Goals and Ideas

One of the most important goals that students identified for the long-term was the transformation of DHS into a national model for environmental sustainability in government (mirroring DHS' emergence as a national model for human services delivery). The strategies to support this long-term goal focused on embedding environmental practices into culture and values of DHS, and being efficient and effective in "greening" the organization. Many of the students' long-term strategies were resource-intensive and involved structural changes to DHS facilities; others sought to change the ways in which DHS engages its clients and the community to reflect the principles of environmental sustainability. Students thought that in the long-term, DHS should:

- Become a national model for green human services
- Integrate sustainability into DHS' values and practices
- Improve efficiency and save money
- Promote green jobs to clients and community
- Make changes to DHS facilities:
 - Green roofs;
 - Eco-friendly HVAC systems;
 - Solar, geothermal, and hydroelectric energy;
 - Eco-friendly furniture and fixtures; and
 - Eco-friendly computers and technology.

The following slides represent some ideas students had for the long-term:

Buildings... "growing the foundation of your organization"

Green Roof of Chicago City Hall



IMC LINC: Quick Fix Six Months One Year Two Year +

Buildings... "growing the foundation of your organization"

Solar Energy

- Large initial costs that can be recouped in 10-15 years
- Prices for solar panels are dropping and competition in the field is making this option more affordable.
- To calculate how many square inches of solar panel you need for a building you need to know: how much power the building consumes and where the building is located.

IMC LINC: Quick Fix Six Months One Year Two Year +

Buildings... "growing the foundation of your organization"

Hydroelectricity

- Small to medium turbines designed to be integrated into any existing pipes and other dropping flow systems
- Suggest installation in rain gutters of DHS buildings
- Stable and distributed energy source

IMC LINC: Quick Fix Six Months One Year Two Year +

Long Term Goals

- Sustainability is reflected into every facet of the guiding principles and practices of DHS's mission and values
- Improved quality of life for everyone in Allegheny County
- DHS is a model of sustainability among all human services organizations and beyond
- Money and resources saved through introducing more efficiency into activities of DHS

Contribution to Healthy Sustainability

Case Findings

STRATEGIES FOR DHS STAKEHOLDERS

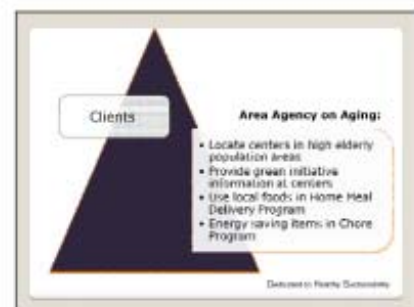
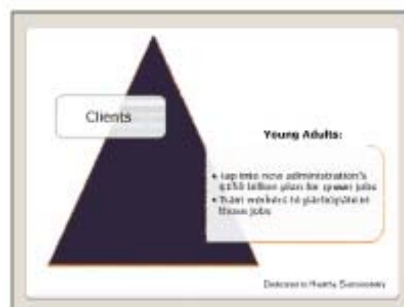
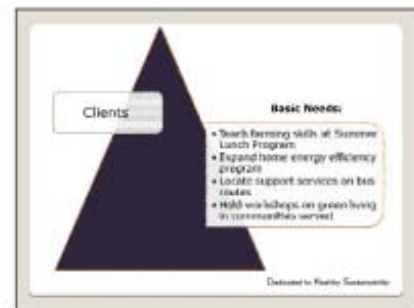
In addition to identifying strategies that DHS could employ to become more environmentally sustainable, students were encouraged to outline the tactics DHS would need to employ in order to establish “buy-in” from impacted stakeholder groups (e.g. clients, community members, providers, and staff members).

Clients

Students identified a number of valuable ways to involve clients in DHS’ green efforts, including helping them find “green” jobs, educating them about environmental practices, and involving them in the DHS “greening” process. Ways to reach clients include:

- Include clients on committees
- Provide training for “green” jobs:
 - President-elect Obama intends to promote and grow the green job sector during his presidency
 - Green jobs are difficult to outsource and could provide stable work for low-income individuals
- Educate clients on greening and sustainability
- Promote urban farming
- Help clients improve their own practices (e.g. recycling and energy efficiency at home)
- Partner with schools to educate and involve children
- Encourage public transit use by providing discounts or incentives

Some ideas for involving clients are outlined on the slides below:



Case Findings

Community

In order to engage the community in its greening initiative, students thought DHS should collaborate with community groups to improve practices in housing, supply more green spaces in the community, and coordinate environmentally friendly volunteer projects with DHS staff members and neighborhood residents. To reach out to the community, DHS could:

- Create or improve community gardens, parks, and urban farming opportunities, perhaps by converting vacant lots into public green spaces.
- Encourage DHS employees to volunteer in the community
- Provide incentives to landlords who implement green practices at their properties
- Partner with Action Housing and/or the Housing Authority to improve practices in low-income housing (recycling, energy efficiency)

Community strategies include the ideas suggested in the following slides:



Case Findings

Service Providers

Since many DHS services are offered through contracted providers, students felt that it was important for DHS to include providers in both the planning and implementation of its environmental initiatives. If DHS hopes to successfully integrate environmental sustainability into the culture and values of the organization, the entire DHS network must be involved. The strategies that students identified for providers mirrored those targeting clients and employees, and included incentives, education and training, and involvement on greening committees. To engage service providers, DHS could:

- Avoid unfunded mandates for greening (i.e., Don't force providers to implement green initiatives without providing them assistance to do so)
- Help providers measure their energy use and set efficiency goals
- Create awards and incentives for meeting goals
- Educate employees of provider agencies about greening
- Establish guidelines to review providers' progress
- Create a greening panel with DHS that includes contracted providers as members

Some of the ideas generated by students for engaging providers are detailed in the slides below:

Engaging Contracted Providers
Step 2: The PMA Program (cont.)

- Important stakeholder: 337 Contracted Providers with 595 contracts amounting to \$770 million
- Carrot-based approach
 - Create a self-perpetuating culture among service providers that embraces environmentally-friendly values
 - Leverage DHS funding, approval, and oversight of providers to effectively engage providers
 - No "unfunded mandates": Mandated change should be zero-cost or cost-saving
 - Institute awards for compliance and innovation

Engaging Contracted Providers
Step 2: The PMA Program (cont.)

- Create a detailed picture of each contracted provider's environmental practices
 - Fixed-cost energy usage
 - Transportation usage
 - Office management practices
 - Waste disposal practices

Engaging Contracted Providers
Step 3: The PMA Program (cont.)

- Provide environmental education to provider's employees
 - Develop educational program providers can implement
 - Allow provider employees to participate in training DHS provides offsite
 - Conduct in-house training for service providers
 - Reward compliance (certification programs, contests for providers with highest percentage of employees certified)

Engaging Contracted Providers
Step 3: The PMA Program (cont.)

- Develop Environmental Standards Certification through modeling of environmental best practices (based on Capability Maturity Model Integration (CMMI))
 - Rank service providers by the maturity level with which they implement environmentally friendly practices
 - Permitting quantitative and qualitative analysis of results
 - Promoting accountability
 - Rewarding/Encouraging Compliance

Case Findings

Employees

Students' focus on employees in the development of short-term goals indicates that employees will play an integral role in DHS' greening process. Key tactics for engaging employees include providing education and training, giving incentives for using alternate transit and implementing green practices, and demonstrating strong leadership on greening initiatives. To involve employees in its greening efforts, DHS could also:

- Provide incentives for participation in green initiatives like recycling and limiting energy use
- Give discounts to purchase bikes or energy efficient vehicles
- Offer a space to freshen up for employees who bike to work
- Provide transportation incentives for biking, carpooling, or using public transit
- Host competitions between departments and individuals
- Give out prizes and gifts for individuals or departments that are most successful in greening their workplace
- Educate employees on how to implement green practices at work and at home
- Hire a Sustainability Coordinator

Suggestions for involving employees are outlined in the following slides:

Reward System

- o Points-System: "Green Employee" of the Month, Quarter, Year
 - Points for:
 - o Carpooling, biking,
 - o Initiating new green ideas,
 - o Taking the stairs,
 - o Taking charge of floors' recycling compliance
 - Wrist:
 - o Gift Cards: Trader Joes, Gas cards

Tracked by the "Green" Intern

Reward System

- o Implementation: Green Intern
- o Track points using:
 - Car-pool database
 - Intern tasks: such as maintaining employee progress with white-board
 - Receipts from energy saving household purchases
- o Reinforce:
 - Add Green section to DHS newsletter or have a new green newsletter (an online publication)
 - Employee blogs, forum, on-line suggestion box
- o Ensure High Buy-in & Compliance

STRATEGIES FOR IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION

Finally, students were asked to explain how DHS would implement this greening initiative and the evaluation strategies they would employ to gauge its success.

Implementation

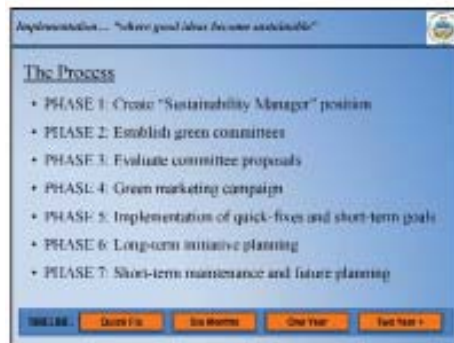
Teams were urged to outline their expectations for various stakeholder groups, identify tactics for managing and enforcing those expectations, prioritize goals in light of limited resources, and anticipate barriers and risk that might stand in the way of successful implementation. In order to effectively implement a greening initiative, DHS could:

Case Findings

•••

- Hold a launch event to raise awareness and interest in DHS greening efforts
 - Distribute water bottles, reusable utensils, plants to employees
- Develop a green campaign website or webpage where employees could track their office's and bureau's energy use, connect with carpools, find helpful tips on resource conservation, etc. This site could be hosted on the DHS intranet.
- Draft a communications plan and announce the greening efforts with a press release
- Convene the task force and/or sustainability council and include department representatives
- Introduce a green marketing campaign for the program
- Implement quick fixes and short-term solutions immediately
- Conduct short-term maintenance while planning for the future

Students developed various plans for implementation, including the following ideas:



Evaluation

- Data-driven evaluation was seen as key to the success of DHS' greening efforts. Students emphasized both quantitative and qualitative evaluation methods, suggesting that DHS should:
 - Set a baseline, research benchmarks, and establish priorities
 - Make certain the plan has clear metrics, is data-driven, and has defined goals and targets
 - Create a timeline for meeting goals
 - Measure and track energy usage and performance, perhaps by using energy auditing software like Utility Manager Pro™
 - Re-evaluate benchmarks and strategies annually
 - Look at impact on vulnerable communities
 - Conduct a consumer satisfaction survey
 - Conduct an employee performance and satisfaction survey

Case Findings

Teams identified several evaluation processes, including those outlined in the following slides:



Competition Evaluation

Feedback about the case competition was solicited from both participants and judges through a short survey. Many judges and students also sent additional feedback via email. The survey results and comments are summarized below.

Student Feedback

Evaluation Findings:

The students report a positive experience with the case competition:

- 100% agreed that the experience was positive.
- In their comments, most students indicated that they gained a favorable perception of DHS through the competition.
- More than 95% liked being assigned to an interdisciplinary team.
- More than 90% thought the interaction with the judges was positive.
- More than 70% agreed that they would participate in another case competition.

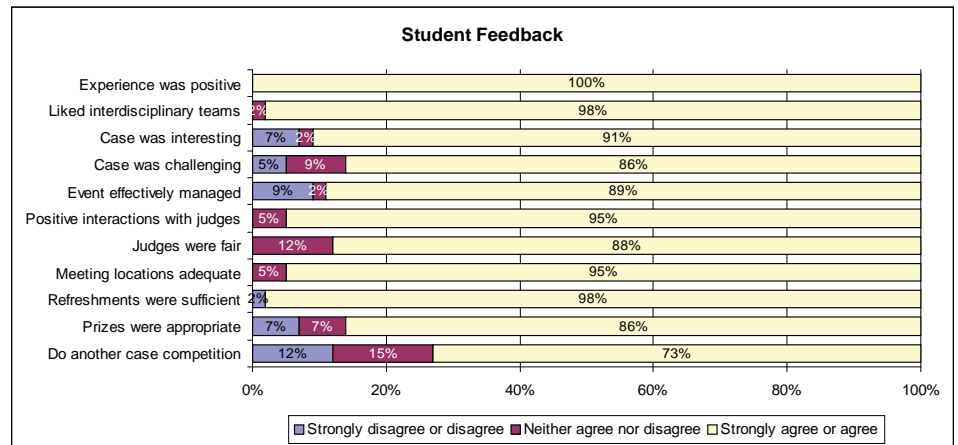
Students expressed that the event was well-managed:

- More than 85% believed that DHS staff members were effective in managing the event.
- More than 90% found the meeting locations to be adequate.
- More than 95% thought that the refreshments were sufficient.
- More than 80% felt the prizes were appropriate.

Competition Evaluation

Despite generally positive feedback, students identified several ways in which the competition could have been improved:

- 9% of students did not think that the event was effectively managed.
- 8% percent did not find the case to be interesting.
- 8% did not feel the prizes were appropriate.
- 12% would not participate in another case competition.



Written comments:

Students provided many valuable comments on their evaluations. These comments are important to DHS and will be considered when planning future case competitions.

Some of the most popular aspects of the case competition were being assigned to an interdisciplinary team, using skills in a real-life setting, learning about DHS, networking with professionals and other students, and being presented with a challenging and interesting case.

Students also provided a number of suggestions for future competitions. After the 2007 case competition, many students suggested that the case topic was inappropriate or too broad for a case competition. Despite an attempt to address that concern in the planning of the 2008 case, several students voiced the same complaint; however, fewer students indicated dissatisfaction with the greening case. Other student suggestions include holding the event at a different time of year when students may be less busy, providing more feedback to students, giving a clearer picture of how the judges scored participants, and providing a more detailed case.

Students' comments can be found in Appendix A.

Competition Evaluation

Judge Feedback

Evaluation Findings:

The judges overwhelmingly indicated a positive experience with the case competition:

- 100% of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the experience was positive.
- More than 80% strongly agreed that they would participate in the event again.
- 100% of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the interaction with students was positive.

Judges also believed that the case itself was effective:

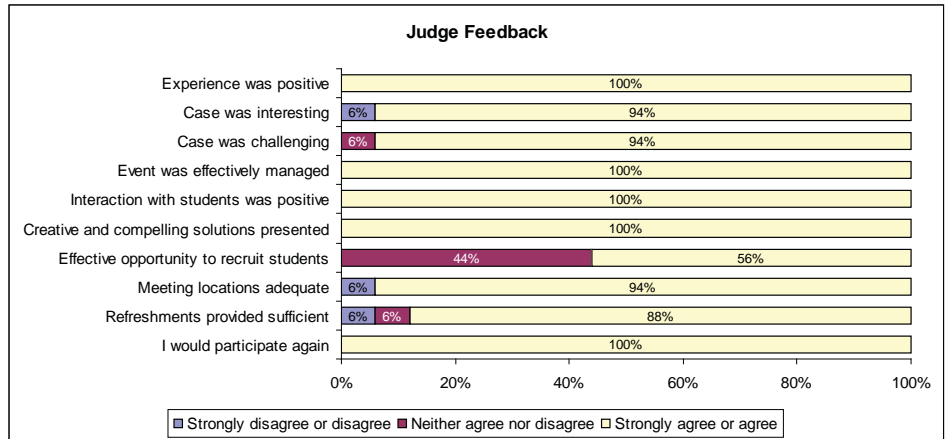
- Only one judge indicated that he or she did not find the case interesting.
- Only one judge indicated that he or she did not find the case challenging.

Judges suggested that the event was well-managed:

- Nearly 80% strongly agreed that DHS staff members were effective in managing the event.
- More than 90% felt that the meeting location was adequate.
- Nearly 90% agreed or strongly agreed that the refreshments were sufficient.

Judges had mixed feelings on whether the case competition was an effective way to recruit students:

- Almost 60% of judges agreed or strongly agreed that the case competition was an effective way to recruit students; 44% neither agreed nor disagreed.



Competition Evaluation

For the most part, judges were extremely positive in their written comments. Some applauded DHS for the running of the event and for holding a competition of this type; others indicated that they enjoyed the opportunity to network with students and other judges. Suggestions focused primarily on logistics, including meeting spaces, food offerings, and pre-competition preparation or briefings for judges. Judges' written comments can be found in Appendix A.

Conclusions and Next Steps

The participants in the 2008 Local Government Case Competition generated many ideas for improving DHS' environmental sustainability. DHS takes seriously its responsibility to explore and implement these ideas when feasible. The Department plans to convene a group of employees who are interested in improving DHS' environmental practices. This group will discuss how DHS can use the ideas generated from the 2008 case competition and how they will be implemented.

The feedback provided by students and judges will also be seriously considered. A focus group – composed of DHS staff, student participants, and judges – will convene in January 2009 to discuss the content and depth of the case, logistics and timing of the competition, team formation, judge selection, judging criteria and scoring, and prizes for participants. Ideas generated by this group will be used to improve future case competitions.

Appendix A: Participant Feedback

STUDENTS' FEEDBACK

Comments:

- Pretty well-run, smooth, organized, professional.
- The case was fun because I really enjoyed working with my group. Even though it was an enormous amount of work we took on, it was actually fun. I was amazed by how much we accomplished and how well we work together.
- The judges and other participants were very good about spending time networking with the students. In just a brief time, I feel as though I've made lifelong friends with my teammates, and know that I will be able to call on their interdisciplinary skills in the future.
- This was a great experience. It taught me to work effectively and efficiently in a group setting. My team worked so well together, which really helped us to design a useful product. I am not someone who likes competition, but I saw this more as an opportunity to learn how to use a team's strengths to get the job done! I only wish I had this kind of productivity in all the work that I do. I also like how the problem was a real-life issue and that our ideas will really be used by DHS to better the communities it serves.

Appendix A: Participant Feedback

•••

- I really enjoyed the interdisciplinary involvement. I think overall this was a very positive experience. Meeting locations were very convenient. Thank you for the experience.
- This was a very unique and amazing experience.
- Very educational experience. I've only been a part of a business program for 10 weeks now and this event really enlightened me on how my degree could be used in the long and short run. Also, meeting diverse and inspired students from around the country was very encouraging to my personal goals.
- The venue was much better this year. I loved the case!
- The competition was an excellent learning experience; it allowed me to work with students whose backgrounds were so different from my own. I learned about certain values of different professions and it gave me a deeper understanding of how groups with multiple agendas and perspectives need to work collectively to arrive at consensus.
- I really liked this challenge because it allowed me to use my skills as well as see how far I could stretch my ideas.
- Team diversity was fantastic regarding schools, programs, disciplines, and background. Great organization and support from DHS staff and community with staffing, coordination and judges. Great feedback and evaluation.
- Time frame was realistic. Enjoyed the business-like conditions. Team work was beneficial to see our ability to work together effectively now vs. in the past.
- I felt that the competition was both challenging and interesting. I really enjoyed the interdisciplinary focus of the team development.
- I really liked working with my group and meeting people outside of Heinz.
- It was very well run and organized. It was nice to work with people from other universities.
- Team assignments were fair and accurate.
- It was very interesting! Thanks for planning it!
- There was great support from your staff, which says a lot. There were many judges from the community and they contributed significantly to the success of the event through conversations, feedback and overall engagement. The site was also nice and it was noticeably well-coordinated.
- I found participating in the competition to be a very valuable experience. Hope you hold it again next year!
- Even though my team didn't win, it was still a great experience and allowed me to learn about new opportunities in the county.
- Great event. It was a wonderful experience. Thanks!

Appendix A: Participant Feedback

Suggestions:

- I know school terms are always busy for grad students, but it may work best to host this competition towards the beginning of the spring semester. This way first years can participate (as well as 2nd years), but it may be further from mid-terms and final projects. Regardless of the busy time frame, I found this competition fun and inspiring.
- It would be nice to have more opportunities for members of non-winning teams to network and get recognition for the level of work put into the event.
- More consideration should be given to the formation of teams, and possibly to the participants. Overall it was a good experience, but there seemed to be a wide discrepancy in the level of commitment and willingness to work on the project.
- Please try to schedule this event earlier in the semester.
- The topic was very broad, which in part makes sense for seeking originality of presentations, but not really relating to an actual government issue.
- Maybe organize the competition earlier in the semester.
- I don't know if the judging was fair because I don't know how they made their choices or what other teams offered.
- Better feedback needs to be given.
- Maybe hold case competition at the beginning of second semester in January.
- I think that timing of the competition is the only real drawback. Perhaps having the competition early in the spring semester (late January)- less assignments, class schedule is more flexible.
- This should not have been called a "case competition." There was no case presented. It felt like DHS was "using" grad students as consultants rather than hiring out for one. In the future it needs to be presented differently to prospective competitors. My skills were not used or challenged with this assignment.
- This really was not a case in that an environmental engineer's opinion would have been better at advising you. I'm not at all knowledgeable on the environment and having 24 hours to get up-to-date was a big task. I feel I didn't get to utilize the skills I thought I had to offer to my group given the topic.
- I'd like to see a more specific case challenge, perhaps with pre-existing obstacles to overcome.
- Ideally the case should be presented in a more organized manner. The judging criteria seemed somewhat too objective. The best plans tend to follow no set guidelines. So overall it was ok. But I wouldn't do this program without an overhaul of the execution.

Appendix A: Participant Feedback

JUDGES' FEEDBACK

Comments:

- Thanks for the wonderful experience. I would love to do this again next year or make sure another staff member of ours participates. You all did a fantastic job!
- Congratulations on a wonderful program.
- Sustainable Pittsburgh would be happy to work with DHS to further conduct a Sustainability Assessment beginning with consideration of the students' excellent product. We provide a comprehensive service with many parallels to what the students addressed.
- Incredible networking opportunity. High-quality recommendations from students.
- Very effective and creative approach. Kudos to DHS. So much value was provided to DHS and to the students. You have set the bar high for other departments in Allegheny County. Consider inviting some key community leaders to hear the final presentations so others can be inspired.
- I think this competition is an amazing experience for students to have an opportunity to work on real world issues. I would strongly encourage greater advertising of the event to students! DHS staff was fantastic.
- Case room space was not adequate.
- Our location for the small morning deliberation was not optimal. You need more vegetarian options (since those who are not eat it as well). This was an inspiring experience. Executives have much to learn about being quick and efficient and thoughtful.
- Great event! The case was focused enough for the students to provide thoughtful and well-researched proposals. The event was well-organized. This has been tremendously inspiring and a lot of fun. Thank you!
- Recommend a coffee break mid-morning. Panels should have a briefing before the start.
- This is a very creative way to engage young minds and hopefully it continues.
- Thank you. The whole competition – content and logistics – was excellent.
- Good diversity of students. Interesting case that students across disciplines can relate to.
- Excellent job!
- A very delightful outreach for DHS. Well done. I worry about the losers. The case was relevant but not particularly interesting. It is also a good way to network with other judges.
- The refreshments took little or no consideration for food allergies.

Allegheny County
Department of Human Services
One Smithfield Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Phone: 412. 350. 5701
Fax: 412.350.4004
www.alleghenycounty.us/dhs

