



VirginiaGreenTravel.org

The 2012 Annual Virginia Green Progress Report



2012 was a very busy and prosperous year for Virginia Green. We continued to grow the program in terms of the number of participants, but we also focused on reaching out to our existing partners to help them improve the quality of their greening efforts and to keep them fully engaged in the program. Additionally, we worked hard to brand our message directly to consumers and to challenge them to support Virginia Green participants via the website and at festivals and events. All the while, we grew partnerships, pursued opportunities, and looked to solidify the future success of the program.

2012 Program Highlights

So many presentations, workshops, site visits, festivals and events, emails and phone calls – and so much progress! Below is a summary of the program areas where we excelled this past year!

❖ **Virginia Is Truly A Green Destination.**

With the addition of 235+ new Virginia Green participants in 2012, Virginia now boasts 1350 ways to *go green*. There are Virginia Green participants in all regions of the Commonwealth, providing environmentally-aware consumers plenty of opportunities to plan their green vacations. It was also clear in 2012 that the quality of our program significantly increased as the environmental programs of our participants matured and green practices became more fully embraced at the staff level.

Virginia Green Participants by Sector

Lodging	515
Restaurants	200
Attractions	160
Conference Centers	58
Convention Centers	4
Wineries	20
Supporting Organizations	40
Visitor/Welcome Centers	33
Green Events	220
Green Suppliers	100
Total	1350

❖ **Program Impacts & Results**

Virginia Green does not require its participants to file annual reports, but we've worked

very closely with many of our partners through technical assistance and the awards program to discern real accomplishments and overall trends within the program. We are confident that the majority of our program partners are fully implementing the required commitments of the program and are continuously improving every year.

Using our own practical experience and guidance from the **American Hotel & Lodging Association**, we are able to make conservative estimates of the real environmental benefits and cost savings that are being achieved by our members. Based on our current levels of participation, we estimate the program participants have at least achieved the following reductions:

Virginia Green Program Achievements		
Environmental Benefits	Quantity	Cost Savings for Participants
• Wastes Recycled / Diverted from Landfill	10-12,000 tons	\$150,000
• Electricity Use Reduced	264 million kwh	\$26-30 million
• Gas Use Reduced	110,000 tcf	\$1.5 million
• Water Use Reduced	1.2 million ccf	\$1.8 million
• Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduced	450 million lbs	

Additionally, Virginia Green participants report economic benefits in terms of increased business and customer satisfaction directly associated with their efforts to be green. In 2012, facility conference sales staff reported dramatic increases in the number of organizations that required / wanted green conferences and meetings.

❖ Consumer Outreach through Green Festivals & Events



75+ festivals, conferences, and other events were certified Virginia Green in 2012, highlighted by 14 individual events associated directly with *OpSail Virginia 2012*. Virginia Green Event *banners* are now sent (and sent back) to each registered event to help communicate green practices to participants. *OpSail* itself was a huge success, but Virginia Green also fully

branded itself with many significant festivals such as Floyd Fest, the Richmond Folk Festival, and the Richmond Jazz Festival.



❖ Improved Green Practices Through Outreach & Technical Assistance

On-site technical assistance was provided to 35+ Virginia Green participants to help them improve their green practices.

❖ **Increased Branding Through Outreach Materials & Advertising**

In addition to window decals and flags, we added sector-based placards, informative signs, and customized banners to our outreach offerings. Bumper stickers were even piloted, and all of these items are now available for purchase in support of the program’s marketing efforts. Additionally, we received ad-space in Backpacker Magazine via a Virginia Tourism advertising promotion.



❖ **Strategic Partnerships**

We continue to build strategic partnerships with like-minded organizations.

- **Virginia State Parks.** All 35 Virginia State Parks are now registered as Virginia Green Attractions; and in 2012 we provided technical assistance visits to parks in all of their 6 regions. As a result, we identified various needs and were able to arrange for a grant via Dominion Virginia Power and Virginia Green partner Keep Virginia Beautiful to provide new recycling containers in every park. State Parks are now poised to be regional hubs for Virginia Green throughout the state.
- **Keep Virginia Beautiful.** In addition to funding the State Parks project, KVB is now assisting Virginia Green in various partnership opportunities to fund expanded marketing efforts and additional projects.
- **Virginia Clean Marinas Program.** We now have a reciprocal relationship with this program which allows for clean marinas to automatically join Virginia Green and be recognized as Virginia Green Attractions.
- **EPA, Virginia Tech & Manufacturing Extension Partnerships.** We worked with our program partner Virginia DEQ to obtain an EPA grant to support technical assistance to Virginia wineries in 2013. The pilot project will be administered by the Manufacturing Technology Center in Wytheville and is partnered with Virginia Tech’s Grape Chemistry Department.



❖ **Virginia Green Suppliers Network**

The VGSN is now fully launched and is providing directed services to all Virginia Green participants. Fees are administered through the VHTA and directed towards Virginia Green marketing efforts.



❖ **Consumer Engagement & Feedback**

At long last, the on-line consumer feedback card will be fully functional, and participants will begin receiving constructive feedback from green-

mindful consumers. This represents the final implementation of Virginia Green’s unique and highly-leveraged voluntary program “strategy”. Participants self-certify and are “checked on” by consumers, which in turn encourages the participants to continuously improve their green programs.



❖ **Additional Virginia Green Sectors**

We continue to strive towards the goal of providing green opportunities and guidance for every business and organization within Virginia’s tourism industry. In 2012, sector guidance was issued or finalized for Wineries, Campgrounds, Farmers Markets, Shopping Centers, and Golf Courses. Additionally, sector guidance was drafted (but not yet launched) for Breweries, Transportation Facilities, Film Production, and Tour Companies.

❖ **Program Sustainability**

Significant steps were made to provide additional program funding. The Virginia Green Suppliers Network is now a fully-implemented, fee-based directory of green products and service offerings. New Virginia Green placards, banners, signs, and plaques are also beginning to provide some revenue to support marketing efforts. Additionally, several partnership opportunities were pursued that should provide significant opportunities for funding in 2013.

❖ **Virginia Green Travel Star Awards**

24 applications were received and 5 Virginia Green Travel Star Awards were presented in conjunction with the VA-1 Travel Summit. Additionally, 17 Virginia Green Travel Leaders were recognized.



❖ **Social Media**

Virginia Green now has nearly 2100 Facebook fans and made significant strides in regular postings about all ongoing events and opportunities on both Facebook and Twitter.

❖ **Virginia Green Advisory Committee**

3 meetings of the Virginia Green Advisory Committee were held in different regions of the state to increase regional involvement and input.

❖ **Newsletters & Publications**

3 editions of the *Virginia Green Gazette* and 2 editions of the VGSN’s *Green Source* were produced in 2012.



❖ **Program Reporting & Recertification**

Recertification “requirements” were announced in December 2012. We are encouraging all participants to confirm their commitments to the program, update

contact information, and voluntarily provide information / data on their progress. In 2013, we will ask for participants to voluntarily provide any “measurable results” as a part of their recertification.

❖ **Regional Support & Involvement**

Significant progress was made involving the regional tourism boards and other supporting organizations that have committed to help promote Virginia Green. Each supporting organization received guidance and training via a series of conference calls on how to best support the program and how to help visitors find Virginia Green participants.

2012 Program Shortcomings

While the program achievements in 2012 were many, Virginia Green did not achieve all of its stated goals for the year.

- ❖ **Recruitment/Growth.** Membership increased in 2012 from roughly 1112 to 1350 participants; however, our goal was to have 1400 participants by the end of the year.
- ❖ **Delays in Application Interfaces.** There are currently on-line applications for Lodging, Restaurants, Attractions, and Events. However, we had hoped that additional sector applications would be available, and we’ve experienced various difficulties and delays with the existing applications and full functionality of the website.
- ❖ **Partnerships with State Agencies.** We have not fully expanded our partnerships and outreach to other state agencies including VDOT, VDACS, VDH, VABC, and state colleges and universities.
- ❖ **Updates / Contact with Existing Participants.** Facility contacts change constantly. We’ve tried to keep up with email “bounce-backs”, etc, but it is an ongoing struggle to keep all participants fully engaged.
- ❖ **Consumer Outreach / Video.** Customer feedback functionality and production of the consumer-focused video were delayed due to funding priorities.

Summary of Goals for 2013

In 2013, we plan to build upon the many accomplishments of this past year, address the past year’s shortcomings, and embrace new opportunities for strengthening and expanding the program. Here is an abbreviated summary of our goals for the coming year:

- ❖ **Participation.** Increase membership to 1500 participants.
- ❖ **Focus on Regional Advisory Meetings, Outreach, and Assistance Trips Public Recognition Opportunities.** Work with regional partners to host 6 regional advisory events/trips around the state in 2013 and 2 Advisory Committee meetings in Richmond.

❖ **Consumer Engagement & Program Branding.** Actively promote the role of consumers in the program by challenging them to give feedback through the customer feedback program. Additionally, pursue opportunities to exhibit / brand the program through events, advertisements, etc.

❖ **VirginiaGreenTravel.org.** Continue to fully automate the application process and complete the functionality of the consumer website complete with a consumer-focused video.



❖ **Sustaining the Program.** Continue efforts to create funding sources for the program and consider creation of a “foundation” to support fundraising and environmentally-focused projects to be supported by program participants.

❖ **Assistance & Involvement.** Continue to provide technical assistance as time allows, but at least “check-in” with every single participant in 2013 to confirm that they are actively engaged.

❖ **Measurement & Reporting.** Ask all participants to recommit and update their Virginia Green profiles and contact information; and ask for them to voluntarily share outstanding achievements and progress.

❖ **Green Event & Festival Outreach & Consumer Engagement.** Continue green event outreach efforts, and pursue additional opportunities for engaging consumers and branding by working with event planners months prior to their events.

❖ **Richmond 2015 Road Cycling World Championship.** Work to integrate Virginia Green participants with the planning for this international event; and use the race as an incentive for joining Virginia Green.



❖ **Virginia Green Travel Packages & Trip Plans.** Work with Virginia Green participants and supporting organizations to develop and promote Virginia Green *travel packages* and *trip plans*.

❖ **Expand Green Meetings Efforts.** Work with VTC meetings staff to more thoroughly integrate green meetings information and resources; and develop a system to quantify the number of green meetings held in Virginia.



❖ **Sector Programs.** Complete the guidance and officially announce and promote Virginia Green applications and guidance for Breweries, Transportation Centers, and Film Production.

❖ **Welcome / Visitor Centers.** Continue to actively support promotional efforts at

Welcome Centers and all regional Visitor Centers by engaging staff and challenging them to be regional centers for green tourism.

- ❖ **Virginia State Parks.** Promote the parks as “regional hubs” for Virginia Green.
- ❖ **Restaurants.** Place continued emphasis on recruiting and assistance for this critical sector.
- ❖ **Continue to Build Partnerships & Leverage.** VDOT, VABC, VDH, and VDACS should all be active Virginia Green partners. College and high school groups, garden clubs, and local environmental programs are all potential allies for the program as well.
- ❖ **Travel Websites & Publications.** Build upon endorsement of AAA by reaching out to significant travel organizations and encouraging them to recognize Virginia Green participants.
- ❖ **Awards.** Continue and significantly expand the Green Travel Star awards program.
- ❖ **Virginia Green Suppliers Network.** Actively promote VGSN and pursue additional marketing opportunities for its members.



VirginiaGreenTravel.org

Virginia's Encourages Green Tourism Practices.

TRAVEL GREEN!

Virginia Green is run through a partnership between the Virginia Tourism Corporation, the Virginia Department of Environmental Quality, and the Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association.

