



The 2014 Annual Virginia Green Program Progress Report



Taking Virginia Green Travel to the NEXT LEVEL

2014 was a year of continued growth and exciting changes for the Virginia Green program. The Virginia Green program continued to grow in terms of the number of overall partners and in terms engagement with the program. It is exciting to realize that our partners have matured in their commitments to their own environmental programs and that “the environment” is becoming part of who they are as a business.



As targeted in the 2013 plan, the stated goals for Virginia Green in 2014 included ambitious goals for membership, environmental benefits and cost savings for our partners, increased consumer engagement, and accountability for the program. In addition, the 2014 goals included specific measures to support the long-term viability and expansion of the program.

The creation of the new *Virginia Green Travel Alliance* was certainly the year’s most significant undertaking that served to shape the program’s activities in 2014. The new 501c3 non-profit organization was officially formed in July of 2014. The VGTA’s stated mission is support and expand upon the marketing and outreach efforts of the Virginia Green program. The VGTA will seek to actively engage both consumers and Virginia Green Travel partners and encourage expanded green tourism opportunities. Fundraising, strategic partnerships, and pilot full engagement with the environmental needs of Virginia Green partners all with a focus on helping the program and its partners move to the “next level”.

2014 Virginia Green Program Report & Highlights

❖ Participation & Growth in Membership: 2014 Goal – 1550 participants

The program continued to grow both in terms of the number of participants and of those actively engaged. 139 new Virginia Green partners were registered in 2014, and the total of 1554 partners did reach the stated

goal of 1550 participants in 2014. Significant growth continued for *Lodging* (36) and *Restaurant* (23) partners,

while *Festivals & Events* added 70 registered listings in 2014. Additionally, the program was glad to recognize 4 partners in the new *Brewery* category.

Staying engaged with existing Virginia Green partners continues to be a challenge as facility contacts seem to change continuously without notice to the program. However, new tools, such as the “constant-contact” newsletter platform that allows for the program to communicate regularly with participants and more actively track new and changing contact information.

Virginia Green Participants by Sector	
Lodging	571
Restaurants	227
Attractions	175
Conference Centers	59
Convention Centers	3
Wineries	19
Breweries	4
Supporting Organizations	45
Visitor/Welcome Centers	33
Green Festivals & Events	340
Green Suppliers	81
Total	1554

❖ Environmental Benefits & Cost Savings **2014 Goal of 15% increase in all reported areas**

Virginia Green does not require its participants to file annual reports, but it works closely with its partners through technical assistance and the awards program to discern real accomplishments and overall trends. As mentioned above, the green program efforts of our Virginia Green partners have matured significantly over the past few years. Many of our partners have made incredible achievements through their commitments to the program. We are increasingly confident that the majority of our program partners are fully implementing the required program commitments and are continuously improving every year.

As detailed in previous 2 annual reports, the program uses a system to develop conservative estimates of the program’s progress that is based upon real data reported and observed while providing technical assistance and through the award application process, combined with standardized guidance from various sources. Guidance references include the American Hotel & Lodging Association and various guidance documents from the US EPA and other sources, and these have been used to establish a standardized approach that allows us to accurately estimate environmental impacts based on the number of rooms in the program.

Program benefits in previous years were based solely upon the *Lodging* component of the program. This year, the process was expanded to allow for the consideration of the majority of our program partners. All data calculations included a conservative assumption that these partners have, on average, reduced wastes by 25% and reduced water and energy use by 20% versus other similar facilities that have not been engaged in our program.

2014 Environmental Benefits & Cost Savings
by Virginia Green participants (annual reductions & cost savings)

<u>Environmental Benefits</u>	<u>Quantity</u>	<u>Cost Savings for Participants</u>
• Wastes Recycled / Diverted from Landfill	16,000 tons	\$650,000
• Electricity Use Reduced	350 million kwh	\$35 million
• Gas Use Reduced	1300 tbtu	\$13.1 million
• Water Use Reduced	1.1 million ccf	\$11.2 million
• Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduced	262 million lbs	

TOTAL COST SAVINGS by VA Green Partners → \$60,000,000

Sources: EPA, AH&LA, & Virginia Green Travel Star Awards

Clearly, this data indicates the significant impacts of the efforts of our program partners, both in terms of environmental impacts and cost savings for the partners. In 2015, we will continue to work with program partners to gain additional hard data and to verify assumptions used for these calculations.

❖ Increasing Business for Virginia Green Partners 2014 Goals for Increased Engagement

Program partners are benefitting economically from cost savings associated with reduced utility expenditures. In 2014, Virginia Green began focusing squarely on the goal of increasing business for our Virginia Green partners. In addition, the program considered options for actually being able to measure how much green business is being generated in Virginia. Progress can be summarized as:

- ✓ **Consumer Engagement.** Festivals and events was a clear focus for Virginia Green in 2014. Virginia Green Event banners were sent to all certified events to be used to help brand the program and communicate green program commitments in place for the event itself. Program staff also exhibited at several festivals, distributed materials to consumers, and even played major roles in helping to implement green practices for several events.
- ✓ **Green Meetings**
 - In 2014, the meetings and sales staffs from Virginia Green partners was clearly excited about the significant increase in demand for “green meetings”.
 - Green meeting requirements were apparent in terms of RFP’s and in realized business. Virginia Green program staff worked with the Virginia Tourism Corporation to explore ways of documenting green meetings business, but meetings business in general is reportedly very hard to document.
 - The new Green Meetings Professional training class was developed and launched in 2014 by the new Virginia Green Travel Alliance and is meant to provide career development for individuals that will assist and define green meetings in business. The training program will request sales staff to track and report green meetings business.
 - A new “optional reporting form” was developed at included a request to report on this topic.
- ✓ **Increased Business Overall.** Driving individual consumers to choose Virginia Green partners is a complex equation that involves the public, the partners, and marketing. Virginia Green pursued many outreach opportunities in 2014 ranging from increased social media presence, blog features, green getaways and trip plans, and, as mentioned, exhibiting at festivals and conferences.



❖ Regional Tourism Partnerships & Workshops 2014 to Co-Host 6 Regional Workshops



Over the past several years, it has become apparent that active engagement with our regional tourism partners is integral to the future success of the program. No matter how many individual facilities join, it is critical that the regional tourism offices embrace the program and make it their own. Virginia Green partners must work together in their communities so that green-minded visitors will want to come and spend their tourism dollars.

In 2014, Virginia Green made great strides with many of its regional tourism partners. Specific guidance was developed for regional partners that helped frame the relationship with Virginia Green and their roles as Virginia Green Supporting Organizations.

Regional presentations and group discussions were held in 6 regional tourism settings during 2014 – Charlottesville, Chesapeake, Fredericksburg, Blacksburg, Marion, and Arlington. For various reasons, the more “official” Virginia Green Regional Workshops did not materialize in the same fashion as they did in 2013. However, these presentations and meetings were a clear indication of regional commitment and many others committed to hosting workshops in 2015.



❖ The Virginia Green Travel Alliance 2014 Goal: Launch & Pursue Fundraising



In February 2014, the first meeting of the new Virginia Green Travel Alliance was held, and as mentioned, it received its official approval as a 501c3 non-profit organization in July of 2014. The new VGTA has worked to define its mission and its role in support of the Virginia Green program and green tourism in general in Virginia. A new website (www.VirginiaGreenTravelAlliance.com) was launched in September and the organization has already asserted itself as one that will be a driving force for the program overall.

- **The Richmond Folk Festival.** The VGTA and various sponsors adopted the “Greening of the Richmond Folk Festival” as its first “hands-on” project. VGTA trained and oversaw 70+ “green team volunteers” during the 3-day event attended by 120,000+ participants.
- **Green team staffing** at various 8 Virginia Green Travel events and festivals.
- **Virginia Green Travel Conference & Awards** were coordinated by the VGTA.
- A new **Virginia Green Travel Oyster Roast fundraiser** was announced at the conference, and this will take place on March 28, 2015.
- The new **Green Meetings Professional Training** class was debuted at the Virginia Green conference.
- **Strategic partnerships** with several organizations were created to support future Virginia Green marketing and outreach.



❖ The 2nd Annual Virginia Green Travel Conference and Travel Star Awards Celebration



Taking Virginia Green Travel to the NEXT LEVEL!

An incredible event, held in Richmond at the Science Museum of Virginia on December 8-9, 2014 featuring:

- 6 technical workshops featuring 20 speakers on topics ranging from composting to solar to electric vehicles to green event and meeting planning.
- Reception with Mayor Dwight Jones, oyster shell recycling and Virginia oysters, and Virginia Green wineries and breweries.
- Virginia Sec of Nat Resources Molly Ward
- The State of Virginia Green program address
- The 2015 USC world cycling championships
- The 2014 awards luncheon recognized 12 Virginia Green Travel Star Award winners and 16 additional partners received the Virginia Green Travel Leader Award.

2014 Virginia Green Travel Star Award Winners:



- Green Attraction of the Year: John Paul Jones Arena, Charlottesville
- Green Brewery of the Year: Port City Brewing, Alexandria
- Green Event of the Year: EnRichmond Foundation, Richmond
- Green Hotel of the Year: Lorien Hotel & Spa, Alexandria
- Green Inn / Cabins of the Year: Shadow Mountain Escape, Luray
- Green Restaurant of the Year: Local Roots Restaurant, Roanoke
- Green Winery of the Year: North Gate Vineyard, Purcellville
- Green Supporting Organization of the Year: Norfolk International Airport
- Green Supplier of the Year: Natural Organic Process Enterprise, Richmond
- Most Innovative Green Projects:
 - Hyatt Regency Reston Laundry Project, Reston
 - Virginia Oyster Shell Recycling Program, Richmond
 - Inns at Montpelier Virginia Green Project, Montpelier



2014 Virginia Green Travel Leader Award Winners:



- Adventure Kayak Tours, Chesapeake
- Arcady Vineyard Bed and Breakfast, Charlottesville
- Blue Mountain Escape, Linden
- Broad Appétit, Richmond
- Clay Corner Inn, Blacksburg
- Hilton Garden Inn Downtown Richmond
- Mountain Song Inn, Floyd
- Natural Bridge Hotel & Conference Center
- Oak Grove Plantation Bed and Breakfast, South Boston
- Richmond Multisports, Richmond
- Salamander Resort and Spa, Middleburg
- Sandbridge Blue Realty, Virginia Beach
- The Westin Richmond
- University of Mary Washington, Fredericksburg
- Virginia Aquarium & Marine Science Center, Virginia Beach
- Virginia Living Museum, Newport News

❖ Additional Goals & Highlights from 2014

- **Program Recertification & Voluntary Reporting Requirements** were announced in 2014 in conjunction with the 2014 Virginia Green Travel Star Awards. Participants are being required to update their applications / profiles or at least confirm that all of their green commitments and contact information are current. Voluntary reporting was an open-ended format that asked for basic environmental tracking data, but allowed for innovation-sharing as well.
- **Support of the UCI World Cycling Championships that will occur in Richmond during September 2015.** Virginia Green attended 12+ meetings during the 2014 and has already certified the race as a Virginia Green Travel Event. The VGTA has pledged to assist in the full recruitment, training and oversight of green team volunteers and assist in all green event planning for the event.
- **Technical Assistance to Virginia Green** partners continues with more than 60 documented assistance events in 2014. Due to changes in the program's structure, the nature of technical assistance shifted away from the on-site assistance visits that were made in the past to web- and email-based assistance.
- **Virginia Green Suppliers Network** continued to create opportunities for green product and service providers to work directly with Virginia Green partners. Virginia Green staff and the Virginia Hospitality & Travel Association explored



many options for expanding and improving the program's *green business directory*.

- **Social Media** was a continued focus in 2014 as the program's Facebook site grew to over 2600 followers. More than 120 unique posts were made and more than 100 images shared; and the program routinely "boosted" significant posts. Virginia Green partners received the regular communications via the newsletter, the *Virginia Green Gazette*, and other constant-contact notices throughout the year.
- **The Virginia Green Education Series** was announced in 2014 and featured various webinars and other on-line learning opportunities. Virginia Green promoted 15+ webinars and produced 2 unique webinars:
 - Green Power Options for Virginia Green Partners
 - Affordable Solar Power Opportunities

Virginia Green Goals for 2015

2015 will be a year of change for the Virginia Green program. With the new Virginia Green Travel Alliance firmly established, the program will benefit greatly from increased exposure and the partnership opportunities that it is pursuing. The program and its unique partnership will continue to operate and support the core program in much of the same manner. However, the VGTA has ambitious plans to challenge program partners by supporting strategic environmental projects and creating additional opportunities for recognition. The VGTA and the Virginia Green program will work together to help take the program to the **Next Level**.

Core goals for 2015:

- ✓ **Improving the Quality of the Program & Its Partners**
 - Required recertification
 - Expanded voluntary reporting
 - Creation of a new "certification level" that will include verification and/or auditing of program commitments.
 - Continued emphasis on process of calculating and sharing measureable results of the program.
 - Continue to expand the Virginia Green Education Series.
- ✓ **Participation & Expansion in Membership**
 - Goal is to reach 1700 Virginia Green partners in 2015
 - Increased emphasis on expansion of sectors to allow for non-traditional tourism partners such as food trucks and retail operations.
 - Expand participation and engagement with the Virginia Green Suppliers Network.
- ✓ **Marketing & Consumer Engagement**
 - Expand consumer-based engagement through social media through support of the VGTA's outreach efforts.
 - Expansion of outreach efforts at **Virginia Green Events & Festivals** and in support of the VGTA's efforts to partner with select events such as the *2015 UCI World Championships, Lock'n, the Richmond Folk Festival, and Dominion RiverRock*.
 - Continue to work with the Virginia Tourism Corporation to improve the Virginia Green presence at www.VirginiaGreenTravel.org.
 - Develop strategic corporate partnerships that will promote Virginia Green to their staff and customers.
- ✓ **Regional Travel Partner Engagement**
 - Goal is to co-sponsor 5 regional Virginia Green partner events in 2015 that will include training and a green



business expo element.

- Ask all regional partners to submit an annual Virginia Green Support statement that indicates their goals for supporting the program.

✓ **Support Regional Environmental Projects**

- Support the VGTA's efforts to sponsor and support projects such as:
 - The Virginia Oyster Shell Recycling Program and their expansion to the Charlottesville region in 2015.
 - The Hampton Roads Litter Prevention project focused on Marine Debris
 - The Virginia Green Travel Pilot Composting Project that has been proposed to EPA and would support composting acceptance in up to 5 Virginia communities.
 - The Virginia Green Travel Pilot Recycling program that involves the provision of limited free commercial recycling services in conjunction with joining Virginia Green.
 - Sponsorship of Green Festivals (as mentioned)



✓ **The 3rd Annual Virginia Green Travel Conference & Travel Star Awards**

- Continue to support this annual conference and the awards program
- Partner with the VGTA to expand the conference from the standpoint of partner engagement and sponsorships.



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



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For additional information, please contact Virginia Green at VirginiaGreen@deq.virginia.gov or VirginiaGreen@Virginia.org.