

Green Friday: One City's Success with a Four-Day Workweek

by Charles McClendon and Pier Simeri

In June 2008, Avondale, Arizona, became the first city in metropolitan Phoenix to pilot a four-day workweek that entailed closing city hall on Fridays. Known as “Green Friday,” the idea was proposed to the city council by an employee committee as an innovative way to recruit and retain employees, to save energy, to reduce operational costs, and to address government mandates regarding air quality compliance for employers. The program also aimed at improving customer service by providing longer hours at city hall four days a week.

Following the success of the summer-long pilot program (more than 80 percent of employees and residents surveyed were in favor of the schedule), the council unanimously voted to make Green Friday permanent in the fall of 2008. As a result of switching to a four-day workweek, Avondale has reduced its annual janitorial costs by approximately \$10,000.

Annual electrical savings are expected to average approximately \$45,000. By keeping approximately 200 cars off the road during peak hours on Fridays, Green Friday also is helping Avondale meet the requirements of Maricopa County's Trip Reduction Program aimed at reducing traffic impacts on air quality.

It's a trend that is catching on in Arizona: Queen Creek, Buckeye, Fountain Hills, and Mesa have all adopted a four-day workweek.

WHAT IS GREEN FRIDAY?

The city coined the term Green Friday because of the program's heavy emphasis on environmental stewardship, a goal of the city council. City hall is open Monday through Thursday, from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m. City hall employees work 10-hour days, 40 hours a week.

Key services, including sanitation and recycling services, police and fire services, and code enforcement, are not affected by the Friday closure. Satellite facilities—public libraries, community center, and city court—do not close on Fridays. Every effort is made, however, to accommodate an alternative work schedule for employees at those facilities.

Here are some of the factors that make Green Friday a success in Avondale.

Progressive leadership. Avondale's mayor and council were willing to embrace the concept when the employee retention and recruitment committee first proposed it to them. Introducing the program on a trial basis also made it more palatable to employees who had expressed doubts or concerns in the beginning, while assuring citizens that commitment to customer service would not be compromised.

Understanding customers' needs. The city surveyed internal and external customers and found that a majority were willing to accept closing city hall on Friday in exchange for longer hours Monday through Thursday.

Employees are expected to dress professionally every day of the workweek and to put in a full 10 hours a day. Our customers need to know that we are committed to serving them.

By starting business at 7 a.m. and staying open till 6 p.m., residents no longer have to take time off work to conduct business at city hall. Contractors and architects also have the option of dropping their plans off after-hours on the way to and from the office.

Allowing for flexibility. A Green Friday exploratory team met with all department directors to find out how their operations would be impacted by the new schedule and how those concerns could be addressed. The water billing department, for example, changed its schedule for water disconnections (no Friday shutoffs).

During the pilot program, department directors were encouraged to be



flexible while employees worked out child-care and elder-care issues. The human resources department sought employees' input in crafting a holiday pay policy that assured fairness regardless of work schedule.

Employees are saving on commuting, lunch, and child care. They are also able to schedule medical appointments on Fridays, thereby minimizing the time they have to take off work during the rest of the week.

Branding the concept. The public information office "branded" the program to include an eye-catching logo that touted both the environmental benefits and the enhanced customer convenience schedule. The logo was used on the city's Web site, cable channel, posters, Post-it notes, and other items.

Getting the word out early and often. Prior to launching Green Friday, a comprehensive list of frequently asked questions was developed for city employees and residents. City leaders held one-on-one briefings with local media to explain how this would benefit residents and save the city money.

Frontline employees working behind the counters and out in the field served as public information ambassadors by helping to spread the word that change was coming. Information on city hall hours was incorporated in the signature line of outgoing e-mail, and voice mail messages also reminded callers of the schedule.

Timing matters! Avondale launched

Green Friday in summer 2008, at the height of the gasoline crisis. The local media eagerly covered this as a story about an organization's innovative way to cut down on gas costs for employees. Avondale also introduced the program during a lull in the election cycle, avoiding the potential for it to become a political lightning rod.

Online offerings. A user-friendly Web site, a good citizen response management and tracking system, and online services for bill payment and youth sports and class registration help minimize the impact of the Friday closure on citizens.

RETHINKING TRADITIONAL WORK SCHEDULES

Researchers at the Romney Institute of Public Management at Brigham Young University, who studied more than 150 cities in 38 states, examined the effects of implementing a compressed workweek for employees in city government. Their research showed that employees working the four-day, 10-hour workweek reported lower levels of work-family conflict than their counterparts working a traditional schedule and that productivity and ability to serve citizens were increased, not diminished.

This has certainly been the case for Avondale. Employees surveyed report being absent from work less often and having more family and personal time. Employees also strongly felt that the alternative work schedule has improved citizen access to government because of the extended work hours four days each week. **PM**

Charles McClendon is city manager, Avondale, Arizona (cmclendon@avondale.org), and Pier Simeri is director of community relations and public affairs, Avondale (psimeri@avondale.org).

For more information on Avondale's Green Friday program, visit www.avondale.org. Also see *Cities Leading the Way: The Use of Alternative Work Schedules* by Rex L. Facer II, Lori Wadsworth, and Chyleen Arbon, Romney Institute of Public Management, Brigham Young University.