



GREEN WILL INITIATIVE MEMBER SHOWCASE

Urban Energy Transition: George Brown Polytechnic Leads with Collaboration and Climate Action

In July 2025, **George Brown Polytechnic (GBP)** was proud to host a collaboration event in partnership with the City of Toronto's **Green Will Initiative (GWI)**. The Polytechnic shares its decarbonization journey and how the GWI has helped accelerate its path to net zero.

On July 23rd, 2025, George Brown Polytechnic hosted a Green Will Initiative member event at **Limberlost Place**, Ontario's first institutional mass timber building designed as a living model of low-carbon innovation. The event, **Urban Energy Transition**, convened 72 public, private, and institutional stakeholders to explore strategies for building decarbonization. Limberlost Place showcased low-carbon innovation through mass timber construction, solar chimneys, passive ventilation, and integration into a district energy system.

A facilitated decarbonization workshop was hosted by George Brown Polytechnic's **Brookfield Sustainability Institute (BSI)** that received over 100 real-time member responses. Designed to uncover shared challenges, surface emerging solutions, and spark interactive discussion, the session brought members together to reflect on both the pressures and momentum shaping their decarbonization journeys.

Questions were centred around the awareness of existing decarbonization case studies and uncovering where members felt the greatest pressures and momentum in decarbonizing their buildings.

The three biggest challenges members faced in decarbonizing their buildings included:

1

Funding & return on investment (ROI)

2

Size, scope & staff

3

Building diversity & heritage buildings



Organization: George Brown Polytechnic

Founding Year: 1967

Location(s): Toronto

Building Type:

Institutional Education Campus

Number of Buildings: 15

12 buildings where George Brown is directly responsible for energy management

3 Polytechnic campuses

Size of Building Portfolio: 19.21M Sqft

Number of Buildings Reported Through Toronto's Energy and Water Reporting Bylaw (T-EWRB): 12

GWI Recognition Level(s): Advocate, Collaborator

Emissions Reductions Milestone:

Achieve a 50% reduction in operational building emissions by 2035 and net-zero operational carbon by 2040

George Brown Polytechnic's Integrated Energy and Water Master Plan (IEWMP)

During the event, George Brown officially unveiled its **Integrated Energy and Water Master Plan (IEWMP)**, a bold roadmap to decarbonize all Polytechnic campuses by 2040.

The IEWMP outlines three primary targets:

- 1 Achieve a 50% reduction in operational building emissions by 2035
- 2 Achieve net zero operational carbon by 2040
- 3 Follow Canadian Green Building Council's Zero Carbon Building standard for new buildings and renovations

George Brown Polytechnic's Director of Sustainability, Mary Livera Ranaweera, and Energy Management Specialist, Matthew Archdekin, spoke about the central role of partnerships in realizing this vision. Notably, they emphasized how early collaboration with Toronto Hydro and the Green Will Initiative helped shape the IEWMP's development and technical direction.

Challenges and Lessons Learned

In 2023, George Brown Polytechnic deepened its commitment to sustainability by appointing its first Director of Sustainability and establishing a dedicated climate action team. Three additional specialists were brought on board to focus on Scope 1 and 2 emissions, including energy use and on-site operations, and one focused on Scope 3 emissions such as procurement and waste.

While sustainability was already a strategic priority for the Polytechnic, the new team's first year brought key challenges. These included establishing legitimacy within the Polytechnic community, addressing gaps in historical and real-time utility data, balancing energy efficiency goals with occupant comfort, and developing a long-term strategy amid financial constraints and competing institutional priorities.



To address these challenges, the team pursued early wins, including optimizing equipment scheduling with operational staff and partnering with the Green Will Initiative on an Energy Treasure Hunt to uncover efficiency opportunities. Recognizing the limitations around data access, the team established strong relationships with key utility account contacts. Toronto Hydro provided access to both historical utility information and real-time insights via Power Lens, enabling more informed decision-making.

The Polytechnic supplemented this work with a comprehensive metering system focused first on the building level with the intention of capturing critical equipment. Armed with this information, the team conducted targeted site visits with facilities operations to identify immediate energy-saving opportunities.

To advance projects in a fiscally challenging environment, the team partnered with BOMA, the IESO, and local utility providers to explore incentive programs that could offset the costs of energy audits and feasibility studies.

Key lessons that emerged included the value of face-to-face conversations with colleagues in building awareness, fostering collaboration, establishing legitimacy, and the importance of ongoing communication with utility providers to align with the Polytechnic's decarbonization plans and enable early planning.

Despite the challenges, this proactive, collaborative approach established a stronger sustainability presence, positioning George Brown to lead by example in the post-secondary sector.



GWI Program Pathway

In 2023, George Brown Polytechnic was invited by the City of Toronto to join the Green Will Initiative (GWI), a collective of organizations committed to advancing decarbonization. At the time, George Brown was in the early stages of developing its own decarbonization roadmap and initially questioned whether joining a city-wide initiative was the right move. However, the organization quickly discovered that GWI is designed to support organizations at all stages of their climate action journey.

Through the program, George Brown gained access to training from CIET (Canadian Institute for Energy Training), which provided foundational knowledge to inform energy and decarbonization projects. George Brown was also able to learn from the experiences of more advanced members, which helped to avoid common pitfalls and accelerate our progress. Guidance from subject matter experts on topics ranging from building automation systems to commissioning practices proved invaluable.

GWI's Recognition Program offered a reputational boost, enhancing awareness and legitimacy among students and staff. Importantly, the initiative empowered the Polytechnic to share its decarbonization journey more publicly, including delivering learning sessions through BOMA and hosting a major event at Limberlost Place. This event not only highlighted George Brown's net zero, mass timber facility but also allowed the Polytechnic to discuss how they are tackling the broader challenge of decarbonizing a diverse campus building portfolio. GWI has become a key platform in building both George Brown's capacity and credibility in climate action.

Recognition

*George Brown Polytechnic has achieved two categories, **Advocate** and **Collaborator**, under the Green Will Initiative Recognition Program, acknowledging the organization's contributions to climate action and community leadership.*

The Polytechnic plans to achieve the Mobilizer recognition category in 2026 and release sustainability-related stories every school semester. Hosting the July event was an opportunity to share its progress, inspire others, and demonstrate how program participation can accelerate an organization's path to net zero.



Call to Action

Organizations that own or operate building portfolios within Toronto are welcome to join the Green Will Initiative to demonstrate climate leadership, collaborate on low-carbon building solutions, and contribute to a growing network committed to reducing emissions city-wide. Interested groups can explore opportunities for joint planning, content development, and community engagement with the Green Will Initiative.

Collaboration on future events with member organizations is always encouraged. These partnerships play a vital role in amplifying the reach and impact of sustainability-focused programming. GWI members are also invited to contribute resources such as case studies, templates, and best practices to foster shared learning and inspire climate leadership across Toronto's building portfolios.

Learn more about the Green Will Initiative [here](#).

Interested in joining the Green Will Initiative or hosting the next collaboration event?

Connect with us at greenwill@toronto.ca