

7 Key Skills Valued by Green Employers

By: [Lisa Yee-Litzenberg](#) ('92)

As a green career expert leading my own career coaching practice, I am often asked by students, recent graduates, and career changers, "What are the key skills that green employers look for when hiring new staff?"

When I began my work to lead the career services for environmental graduate students at the University of Michigan, one of the first things I did was to assess what skills were needed most in green careers. In this article, I outline seven key skills that I saw over and over when reviewing hundreds of environmental job postings across a variety of sectors. Recently, I reached out to five University of Michigan alumni, working in green careers, to get their thoughts on what skills are valued in their fields. Their comments reinforced what I found in my initial research.

How Can I Use this List of Skills?

While you might not have every skill on this list, it would be good to assess which of these skills you do have and to highlight them on your resume and in your LinkedIn profile. This is particularly true for those who are unsure of their career direction and not sure which skills are important to highlight. You can be confident that these seven skills will be highly valued by green employers. For those that have a more targeted career focus area, you will need to also look at specific job postings in your field to identify additional skills to highlight.

Take time to identify and add any specialized technical skills that may be required in your green career field by looking at specific job postings. These are often highly specific to each career focus area. Lastly, think about real life examples you can use in an interview or while introducing yourself at a conference that highlight your abilities in these areas. You will need to communicate these skills effectively online, on paper, and in person.

Skill 1: Communication (Written and Verbal)

Strong communication skills are critical to most green jobs. Many employers value the ability to communicate complex topics to general audiences whether via report writing, newsletter articles, presentations or via social media. Additionally, being able to communicate across departments within an organization and externally are also highly valued by green employers.



[Femi Sawyerr](#) (MS '15) is a Consultant at Energy and Environmental Economics in San Francisco and he identified communication skills as critical for sustainable energy consultants.

Sawyerr says, “Communication is a very key skill because many times I am required to convey a very technical analysis to an audience that does not have a high level of expertise in the subject matter. Communication skills are essential for creating a narrative that is compelling to the intended audience regardless of their knowledge or expertise in the subject matter.”

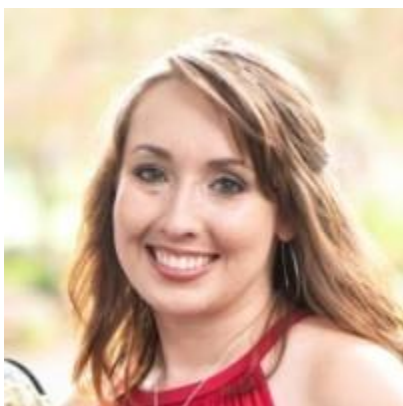
Skill 2: Leadership/ Showing Initiative

Many sustainability employers look for people who have leadership potential or who have shown initiative in the past to make improvements to streamline a process or to save them time or money. These are the kinds of people they want tackling the toughest environmental challenges. As a career coach, my advice is to highlight examples where you took the initiative to improve something as it will impress employers.

During my past work at National Wildlife Federation, I often served on hiring teams to bring in new staff. We always kept an eye out for leadership potential, even for junior level roles, to ensure that we had strong talent coming up the pipeline. We would look for examples of candidates that took the initiative to make something better.

Skill 3: Multidisciplinary Team Experience

Many green jobs require the ability to work effectively in teams made up of people from diverse backgrounds and disciplines.



Both [Kate Berg](#) (MS '17) a GIS Consultant with Ramboll in Ann Arbor and [Michelle Mabson](#) (MS/ MPH '15) a Staff Scientist for Healthy Communities at Earthjustice in DC emphasized the importance of being able to work in a multidisciplinary team for professional work in their fields.

Berg commented that, “The ability to work with a multidisciplinary team is vital to what I do. I am constantly working on projects with people from a variety of backgrounds—engineers, geologists, occupational health and safety folks. Multidisciplinary teams are so important because their diverse viewpoints identify more details and considerations that more homogeneous teams would probably miss.”

According to Mabson, one way that she strengthened her multidisciplinary team skills is by, “taking the time to understand how each member of my team functions and fits in the overall scope of a given project and big picture goals.”

Skill 4: Analytical/ Creative Problem Solving Skills

As environmental problems become more complex, green employers place a strong value on the ability to analyze data and to apply the results to come up with innovative solutions. In some cases, having unique experiences, outside of a traditional green career path, may give you new perspectives or unique insights into solving a particular challenge.

As a Scientist, Mabson says that, “Having concrete technical and analytical skills is crucial to working in the environmental field. Whether you are a GIS specialist, STATA expert, or great at translating complex scientific information—hone your analytical skill set and work on your professional development in other key areas as often as you can.”

Skill 5: Interpersonal Skills

Environmental employers care a great deal about people skills. Many green jobs require staff to build effective relationships with diverse constituencies often by being a good listener. In some roles, staff need to be able to build coalitions or partnerships with diverse sectors. And in all roles, staff are expected to get along well with each other to have high functioning teams.



As the Global Network Manager for Indigenous Peoples and Local Communities at The Nature Conservancy in Vancouver, BC, [Mariana Vélez](#)'s (MS '12) work relies on her strong people skills. She says, “My capacity to meaningfully relate within multi-cultural and multi-stakeholder settings allows me to rapidly create connection and trust and identify opportunities for collaboration.”

Her advice for gaining stronger interpersonal skills is to, “Learn how to listen deeply and express your vision and ideas. Be humble about your place in the world and the power differentials that structure the systems we want to change for conservation. Put relationships first, explore the power of collaboration and conflict.”

Skill 6: Management Experience

As people progress in their green careers, management experience will be important to help you grow in your career. Look for ways to gain experience managing people, projects, budgets, and unexpected

changes. Start small, try your hand at managing volunteers and interns at first and then full time staff later. Find opportunities to create a vision for a program and to raise funding. Employers will look for these skills when filling leadership roles.



Elena Takaki (BS '94, MA '99) is the Director of Project WILD at the Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies in DC. Much of her work, as a Director, involves management skills. Takaki highlights how she gained management skills, “Besides practical experience, I took several management courses that included budget management, project management, and people management. All of these courses were paid for by my employer.”

Additionally, Takaki emphasizes that, “A mentor that can help you with these skills may be an excellent resource for you.”

Skill 7: Technical Skills

There are a wide variety of technical skills that environmental employers look for when hiring including specific software skills, operation of specific equipment, data visualization, field work skills, etc. It is important to look carefully at job postings to assess which technical skills are needed for an individual role.

Berg’s role as a GIS Consultant is heavily focused on specific technical skills like creating GIS maps. Having work samples that demonstrate specific technical skills can make a strong impression on employers.

Finding a Green Career Fit

Since many of these skills, with the exception of the technical skills, are general ones that can be obtained from a wide variety of experiences, it is also important to have some applied environmental experience that will give you “street cred” in the environmental arena.

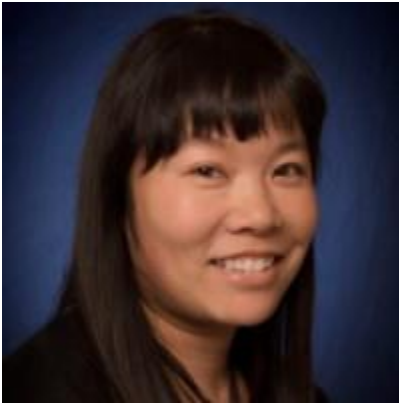
Employers hiring for a sustainability role, for example, will want to see that you have done some work on sustainability projects like starting a recycling program at your school or leading efforts to replace standard light bulbs with energy efficient LED bulbs at a past workplace. If you do not have any applied experience, it will be important to gain experience through research projects, internships or volunteer work to be a competitive candidate.

For those of you that do have some applied environmental experience, your best chances will be to emphasize these experiences and apply for roles that build on those experiences in addition to the seven green career skills highlighted here.

Need Help Finding and Securing a Green Career?

If you are interested in chatting green careers with Lisa and possibly getting her help to find and secure a dream green job, take a few minutes to fill out her [online form](#) to set up a free 30 minute chat.

About Lisa



[Lisa Yee-Litzenberg](#) is a Michigan alumna (BS '92 Natural Resources). She is a certified career coach and President of [Green Career Advisor](#), a small company she launched to help people find and secure their dream green jobs.

Lisa is also a [Preferred Career Coach](#) with the Alumni Association of the University of Michigan. Prior to starting her company, Lisa spent 10 years leading the career services for graduate students at the University of Michigan's School for Environment and Sustainability. She also has 12 years of direct conservation experience in her former work with the National Wildlife Federation.