

IJGlobal Social Infrastructure ESG Award – Georgetown Uni

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Universities across the US have increasingly been looking to their energy sources, casting embarrassed glances at the (often) hugely-polluting units that power campuses... and turned to the infrastructure community to clean up their acts.

In recent times, there have been a slew of transactions like the one being celebrated here – Georgetown University’s utility system which reached [financial close in July 2021](#) to operate – with an SPV brought in to maintain and modernise its facilities.

A team led by ENGIE North America and Axium Infrastructure took point on this PF transaction with Societe Generale acting as lead arranger on the financing.

The university has set itself an ambitious goal to reduce energy use intensity by 35% and achieve carbon neutral status by 2030 by leveraging innovative energy solutions and modernising the existing utility infrastructure.

Georgetown University’s main campus is located in the historic Georgetown neighbourhood of Washington DC and covers more than 100 acres and houses some 60 main buildings and has 19,000 students, 6,200 employees, including 2,200 faculty. Like many colleges, Georgetown functions much like a small city, having to devote considerable labour and financial resources to maintain its power and water needs.

The concessionaire – Georgetown Energy Partners (GEP) – will O&M the utility system for 50 years and the project that includes steam, chilled water, power and domestic water for the main campus location, and downtown law centre facilities.

The agreement – which hands over management of Georgetown’s utility system to ENGIE – will leverage its deep, energy-sector expertise to enhance the O&M of the system. Axium provides exceptional financing resources to enable major infrastructure improvement projects.

GEP is establishing nearly 1 million square feet of LEED-certified buildings on campus; entering into a 15-year renewable PPA that allows the university to source two-thirds of its electricity needs from existing solar plants; committing to divest from fossil fuel companies over the next 10 years; and installing solar panels on and off campus.

On a more grass roots level, it is upgrading 70,000 lighting fixtures to energy efficient light-emitting diodes (LEDs); replacing steam pipes with hot water piping to reduce both the university’s energy usage and its water footprint; and



installing smart meters for energy and water consumption to better analyse and assess its usage and reduction targets.

One of the judges said of this project: “This is a really interesting project. I like the combination of practical improvement of the Georgetown infrastructure with the educational and collaborative approach to driving more sustainable use of the infrastructure.”

Another of the judges adds: “The GEP makes an impact beyond sustainability and carbon reductions at the university. It also impacts education to the extent that money saved can be used elsewhere – eg academics – and this programme provides a workable example for other universities to follow, and can be applied to other institutions. This programme has far-reaching implications.”

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