U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce

2024 Chambers of Commerce Sustainability Report

Building a greener future by analyzing the sustainable and social programs, committees, advocacy, and more of 7000+ chambers of commerce in the United States.

Introduction

Part 1: Environmental

Part 2: Social

Conclusion

About USGCC

U.S. Green Chamber board members and partners at a chamber event in Orange County, California.

Promoting the "Triple Bottom Line": Profitable Financials, Prosperous People, and a Healthy Planet.

The U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce (USGCC) represents the voice of hundreds of thousands of small, midsized, and large American businesses and global corporations advocating for the following:

- Business success and sustainability go hand-in-hand
- Shareholder value and social consciousness co-exist side by side
- Long-term business profits, global leadership, and environmental stewardship are inseparable from each other.

Report Introduction

Chambers of commerce in the United States are adapting the changing business and consumer needs by adding sustainability programs for their members.

Consumers have increasingly prioritized businesses' social and environmental responsibilities when making purchases. In response to growing calls for businesses to become more sustainable, chambers of commerce have expanded their services to address this change in consumer sentiment through programs ranging from increasing workforce diversity to how members can become more energy efficient.

Additionally, these initiatives provide an avenue for a chambers' members to demonstrate their commitment to sustainability to their consumers. These demonstrations are difficult for many smaller businesses to justify investing in on their own. Chambers of commerce are well-positioned to make these investments for the collective benefit of their members, just as they are with other types of member services.

Our Approach

What were the main research goals and analysis methods of this report?

Our research objective was to obtain an overview of the current state of chamber sustainability for both social and environmental initiatives.

This report relies on a mixed methods research approach. Categorical data concerning location and service offerings was manually gathered on each chamber of commerce by inspecting their web presence and other public sources of information, such as press releases.

Research was focused on traditional local and regional chambers and did not include specialized chambers.

Numerical data on chamber revenue was gathered by the ProPublica Nonprofit Explorer API, which itself is based on data from the Internal Revenue Service.
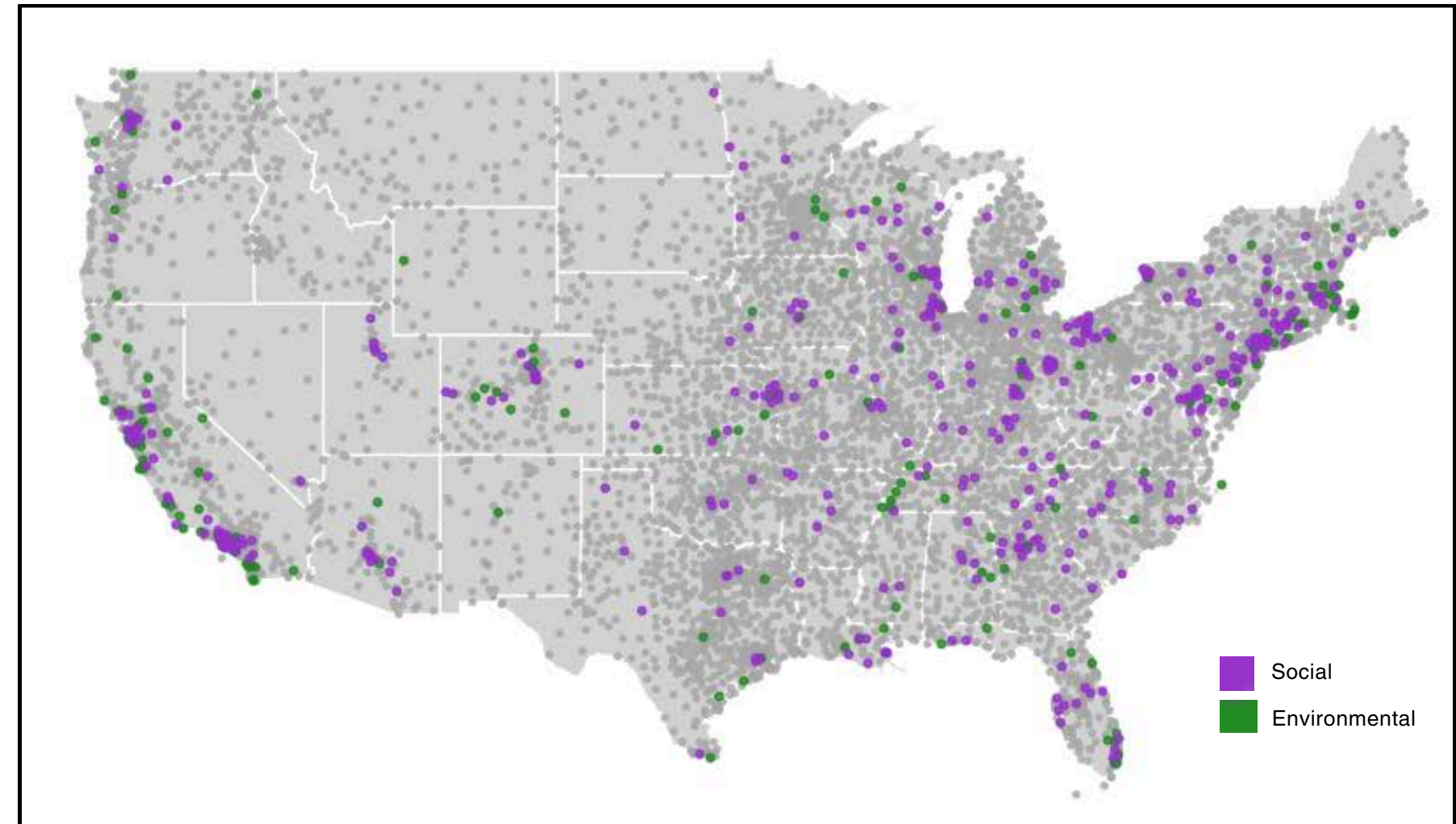
Report Highlights

While many chambers have taken significant steps towards a more sustainable future, there is always room for further growth.

This report analyzes over **7,400** chambers of commerce in the U.S., **nearly 700 of which offer social or environmental sustainability programs**. For both social and environmental initiatives, the same three types of initiatives account for more than half of all offered by chambers — **business programs, committees, and policy platforms.**

Chamber revenue and location also correlate with chambers offering social and environmental responsibility initiatives.

These findings, along with many others contained in this report, demonstrate how chambers of commerce can implement and benefit from offering social and environmental responsibility initiatives to their members.

Map illustrating the locations of chambers of commerce in the United States with social and environmental programs

Report Highlights

These percentages are based upon local and regional chambers in the United States

To determine how many chambers of commerce are taking sustainability actions, the U.S. Green Chamber conducted research that found that currently, 6.98 percent of chambers in the U.S. offer significant social responsibility initiatives while 3.51 percent offer environmental responsibility initiatives.

3.51%
of chambers offer environmental initiatives

6.98%
of chambers offer social initiatives

Environmental

In this section, we will provide a review of green chamber activities. We will explore the most popular environmental activities they undertake, highlighting how these programs are developed and the numerous benefits they offer to businesses and communities.
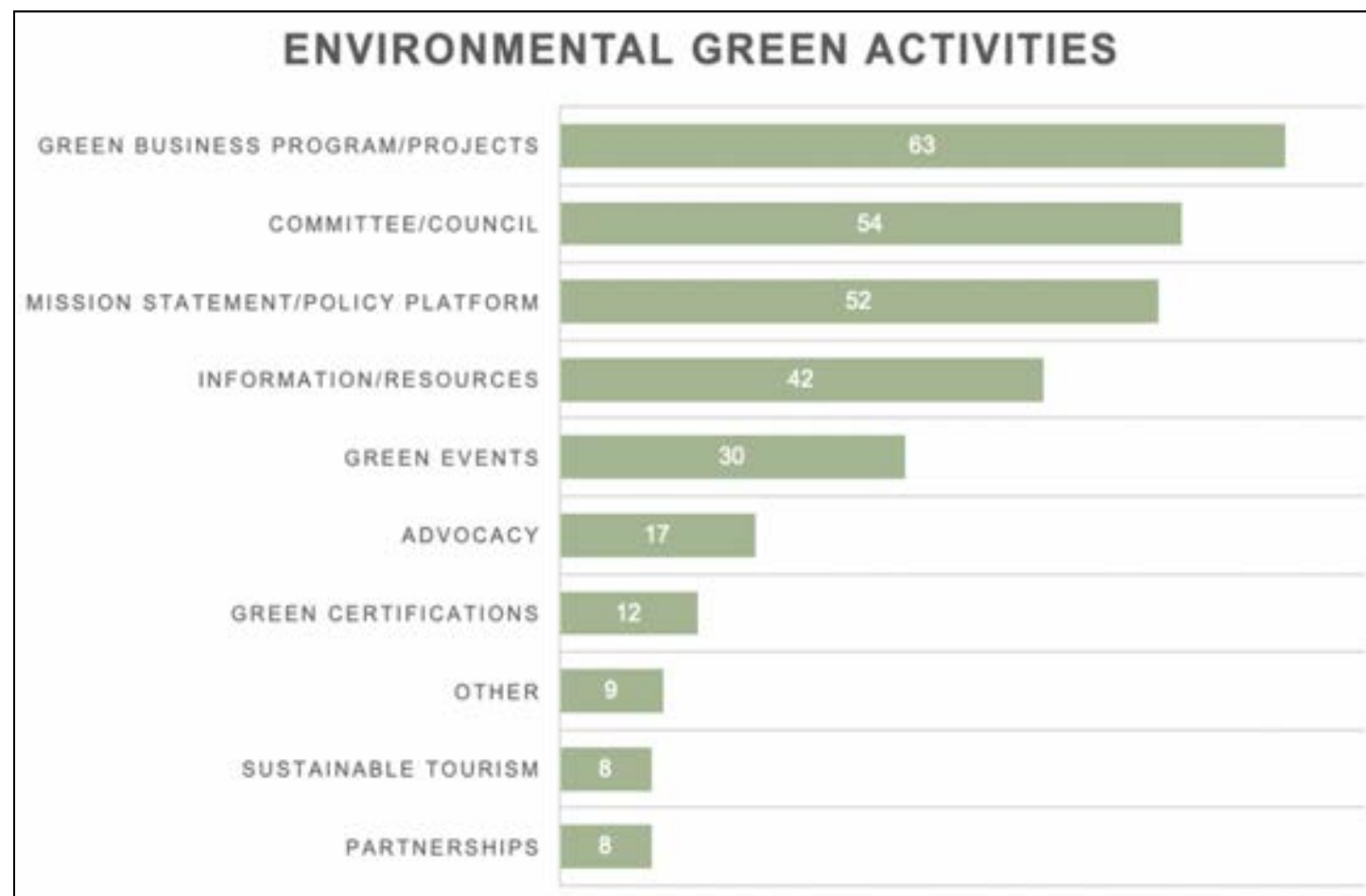
In this section

Environmental Overview

In this age, the environment has taken center stage in the minds of consumers, and for good reason. This in turn has given businesses - and therefore chambers - a financial incentive to consider various environmental factors and initiatives.

A chart showing the number of chambers that implemented each type of environmental activity.

What Chambers Have Done

As a result of these financial incentives, in addition to their typical responsibilities, many chambers have actively engaged in endeavors aimed at fostering environmental sustainability. To promote and develop sustainable business practices, chambers of commerce have developed a variety of different sustainability-focused programs and activities. In a systematic review of 7,300 chambers of commerce, it was found that 295 chambers had environmental programs. Of all these environmental activities, it was manually searched that Green Business Programs, Committee and Council meetings, and Mission Statements and Policy Platforms were the most popular programs used to further sustainability.

This section will provide a look at the most popular environmental chamber activities, including how they are developed and the benefits that they bring. By providing examples of successful green activities and initiatives, this report will establish a baseline for other chambers in the future from which they can draw inspiration.

Green Business Programs

In this subsection, we will discuss the type of green business programs that chambers have implemented. After each program, we will share some recommendations for chambers or businesses on best practices.

In this subsection

Green Business Programs Summary

Green business programs are the most popular type of green activity, representing 63 out of 295 total green activities, or 21%. Green business programs are developed for businesses to create sustainability plans that will help make their company more environmentally conscious. Achieved through services, products, and standards, green business programs set up chambers for sustainable success.

Types of Green Business Programs

This section will cover two types of green business programs, including:

1. Green Business Certifications
2. Community Programs

21% of green chamber activities are green business programs.
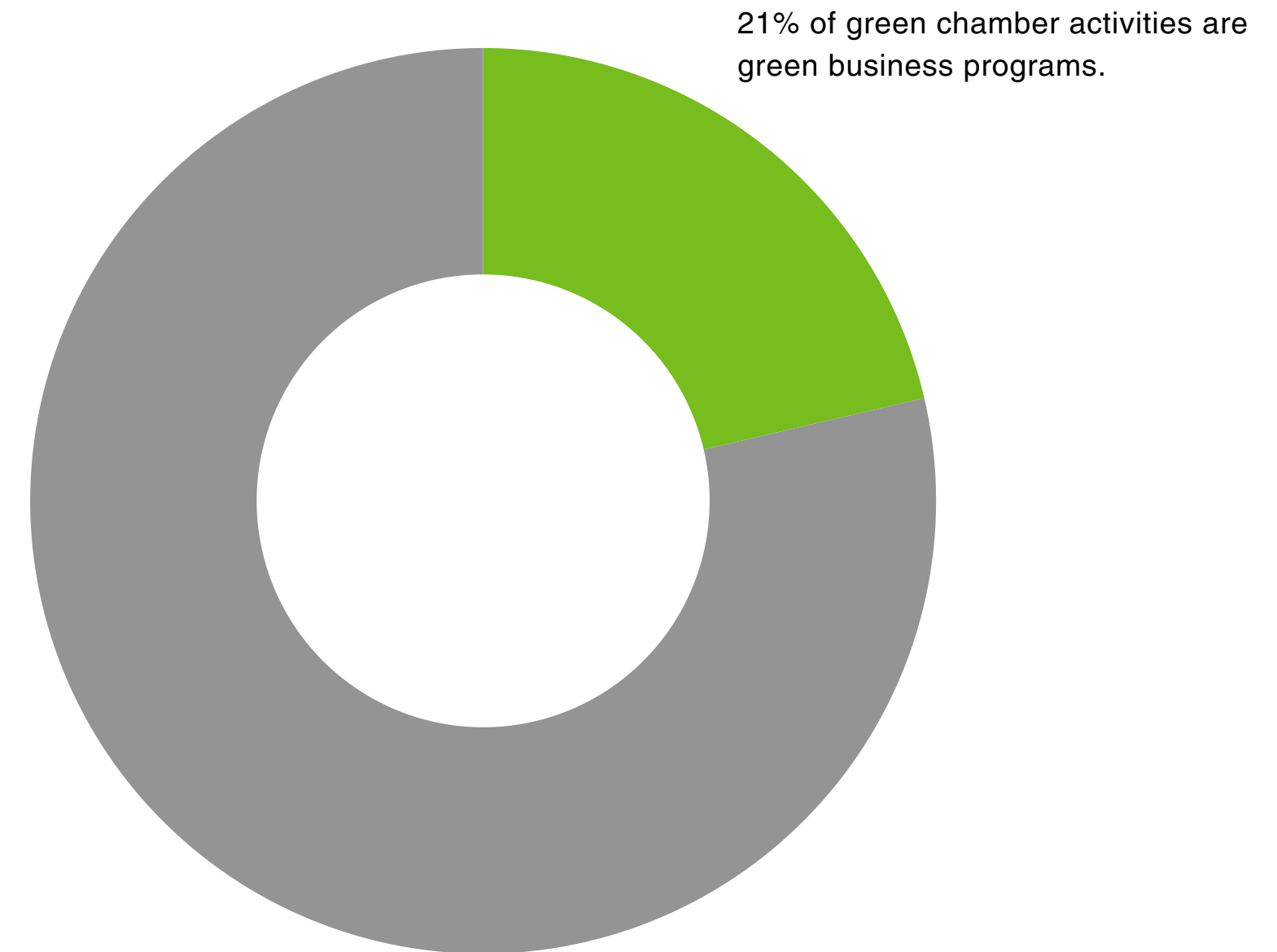
A donut chart illustrating the number of green business programs compared to the number of other green chamber activities.

Green Business Programs - Green Certifications

Green certifications account for 31 total Green Business Programs and involve awarding businesses for their voluntary compliance with high standards of environmental performance.

The different levels of green business practices can vary based on the organization conducting certifications, as well as the type of business. Applying for a certification will usually involve on-site assessments of a businesses' sustainability practices and operations, meetings with sustainability consultants on specific state regulations, and the development of action plans to become green-certified. Sustainable action plans typically encourage businesses to invest in green practices including:

- Water reduction and energy conservation
- Carbon footprint reduction via renewable energy adoption
- Diverting waste through recycling, reuse, and composting
- Pollution prevention via proper disposal methods
- Efficient Transportation

Why Earn a Certificate

The process of earning a green certification can be free in certain states and brings major benefits to both the environment and the organizations involved. Some of the biggest reasons to get a Green Certification include:

- Saving money through reduced energy, water, and waste bills
- Mitigating environmental damage and fighting against climate change
- Gaining a competitive market edge due to consumer demand for sustainability

Out of 63 green business programs, 31 are certifications.

A donut chart illustrating the number of green certifications compared to the number of other green business programs.

Green Business Programs - Green Certifications

The Blair Chamber of Commerce is one chamber that provides businesses with green certifications.

Blair Chamber's sustainability committee awarding a gold certification sustainability certificate. Photo courtesy the Blair Chamber.

Description of the Blair Chamber's Work

One chamber of commerce that has created its own certification program is the Blair Chamber. Their program, Sustainable Blair County, is an innovative program focused on making the business community more sustainable.

One major aspect of their program is a sustainability certification program which encourages businesses to achieve sustainable compliance. The certification program includes a sustainability certification survey which assesses the current progress of chamber member businesses and assigns the business with a certification level.

Based on the business' certification level, Blair County provides a resource list to certified businesses in topics, including energy and water conservation and management, business operations and practices, facilities, and waste management.

More information about Blair County's sustainable certification program can be found at https://www.blairchamber.com/sustainable-blair-county.html.

Green Business Programs - Green Certifications

The Fayetteville Chamber of Commerce is another chamber that provides businesses with green certifications.

A photo of a ribbon cutting ceremony for Smith Hurst, PLC after they were officially certificated by the Fayetteville Chamber as a Greenway business.

Description of the Fayetteville Chamber's Work

Titled the Greenway certification program, Fayetteville Chamber's two year certification program provides recognition and resources for sustainable businesses. After applying for Greenway certification, businesses are tested for their adherence to Greenway standards and practices. To facilitate and develop this process, the Fayetteville Chamber partnered with the local University of Arkansas SIFE group to conduct audits regarding a business' water, energy, waste, education, purchasing, and people practices.

If a business does not meet the outlined standards, Fayetteville will provide recommendations for the businesses to better work towards sustainability before reapplying. Once all standards are met, organizations can become a Greenway-certified business that receives public recognition and the financial and environmental benefits associated with sustainable business practices.

The Greenway certification program currently recognizes 20 certified businesses, including Old Navy, Courtyard by Marriott, Golden Corral, and more. Additional information about the Fayetteville Chamber and Greenway can be found at https://www.fayettevillear.com/greenway.html.

Green Business Programs - Green Certifications

Description of the Network's Work

In addition to creating their own certifications, many chambers have chosen to leverage existing certification programs. One leading organization that provides chambers with green certifications is the California Green Business Network. On a mission to support company efforts to reduce their carbon footprint and resource usage, the California Green Business Network provides both incentives and assistance for Certified Green Businesses. The California Green Business Network has provided certification to numerous chambers nationwide including the Santa Maria Valley and National City chambers of commerce which leverage this reputable organization in helping to certify those who are interested in becoming more sustainable. In total, the efforts of over 4,000 California Green Businesses in 2022 have:

- Reduced over 95 million pounds of greenhouse gas emissions
- Saved 156 millions of gallons of water
- Diverted 17 million pounds of waste from landfills
- Reduced 41 million kWh of energy.

Alongside the positive environmental impact that certification creates, becoming a Green Certified Business has direct financial benefits for involved companies. In fact, 42% of companies certified under the Green Business Network reported increased levels of business after receiving recognition and in 2022 alone, companies saved a total of $11.6 million in utility bills. More information regarding the benefits provided to chambers, companies, and the environment through the California Green Business Network can be found at https://www.greenbusinessca.org/.

California Green Business Network (CGBN) is an organization that provides chambers with the ability to leverage CGBN's green certification program.

A photo of Long Beach Mayor, Dr. Robert Garcia, discussing the California Green Business Network certification program.
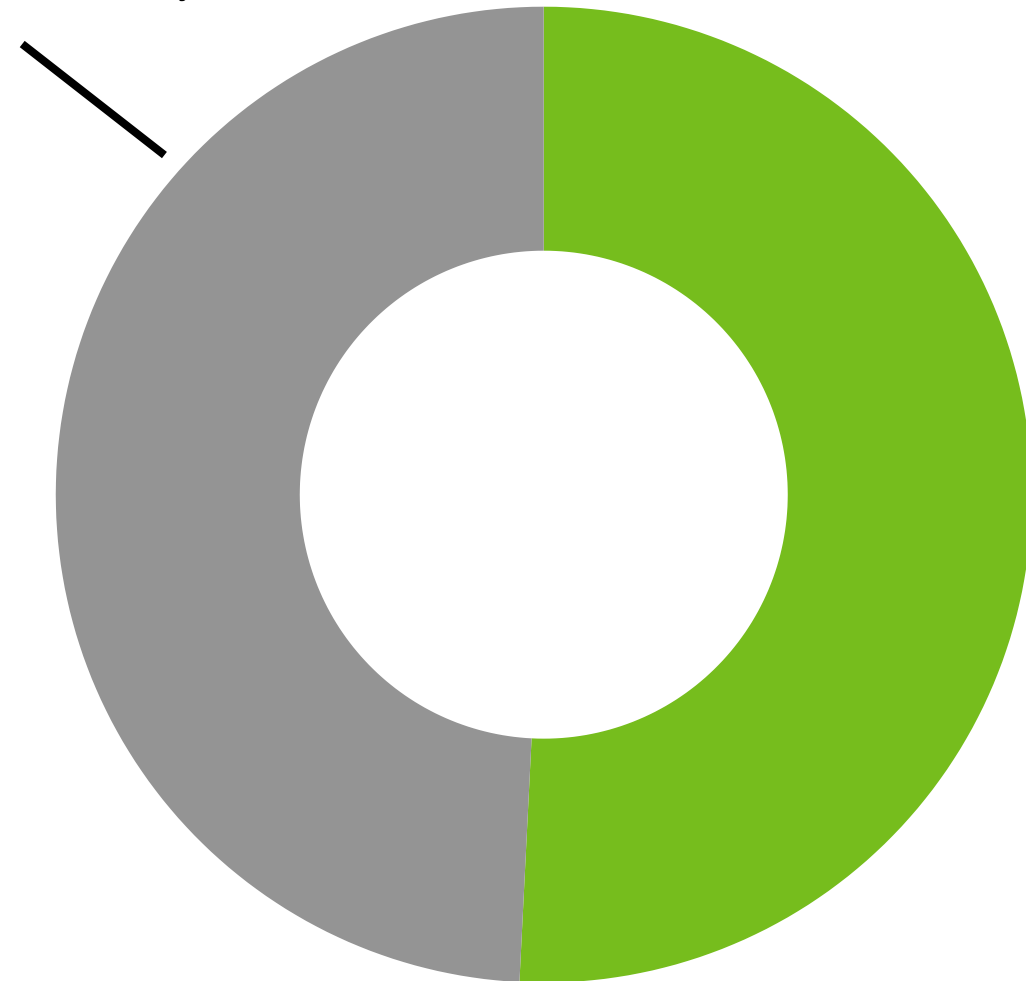
Green Business Programs - Community Programs

Community programs are the most significant type of Green Business Program as they account for 32 green activities conducted by chambers.

Community programs encourage the adoption of sustainable practices by a community for environmental protection while also bringing community members together for a common cause. These programs are typically conducted on a local county level and include projects such as sustainable education initiatives, city projects that emphasize green infrastructure or technology, youth leadership, and anti-litter campaigns that promote recycling, reusing, and reducing.

The goals of community programs vary based on county and targeted environmental problems, but there is a common denominator of incentivizing communities to mitigate environmental damages while increasing public awareness.

Out of 63 green business programs, 32 are community programs.

A donut chart illustrating the number of community programs compared to the number of other green business programs.

Green Business Programs - Community Programs

A photo of a community volunteer work day hosted by the Yorkville Area Chamber of Commerce

One such community program by the Yorkville Area Chamber of Commerce is their litter clean up events

Description of the Yorkville Area Chamber's Work

Conducted on a monthly basis and following major community events, clean-up events are promoted alongside local recycling guides to achieve Yorkville's mission to promote community responsibility for the growing problem of litter and waste. All residents have to do is show up and dedicate an hour of their time towards helping their community and environment, all other supplies including trash bags and pickers are provided. Volunteers are incentivized to sign up for litter removal events by the satisfaction of making Yorkville brighter as well as prizes such as free t-shirts. The location of clean-up events varies throughout communities, ranging from schools to local stores.

Additional information about the Yorkville Area Chamber of Commerce and their litter clean-up program can be found at https://www.yorkvillechamber.org/green-connect/.

Committees and Councils

In this subsection, we will discuss the committees and councils created by chambers of commerce that focus on discussing and working toward solving environmental issues.

In this subsection

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https://usgreenchamber.com/chamber_toolkits/

Committees and Councils Summary

Committee and council meetings are the second most popular type of environmental green activity as 54 green activities, or 18%, are committee or council meetings. The goal of forming committees or hosting council meetings is to discuss and develop strategies in a diverse collaborative environment where different viewpoints and experiences can be considered.

What do committees or councils focus on?

They are most commonly broadly focused on sustainability, but can also be formed for more specific environmental issues including:

- Green initiatives and sustainable business practices
- Agriculture
- Marine and water
- Natural resources and energy

18.3% of green chamber activities are committee and council meetings.
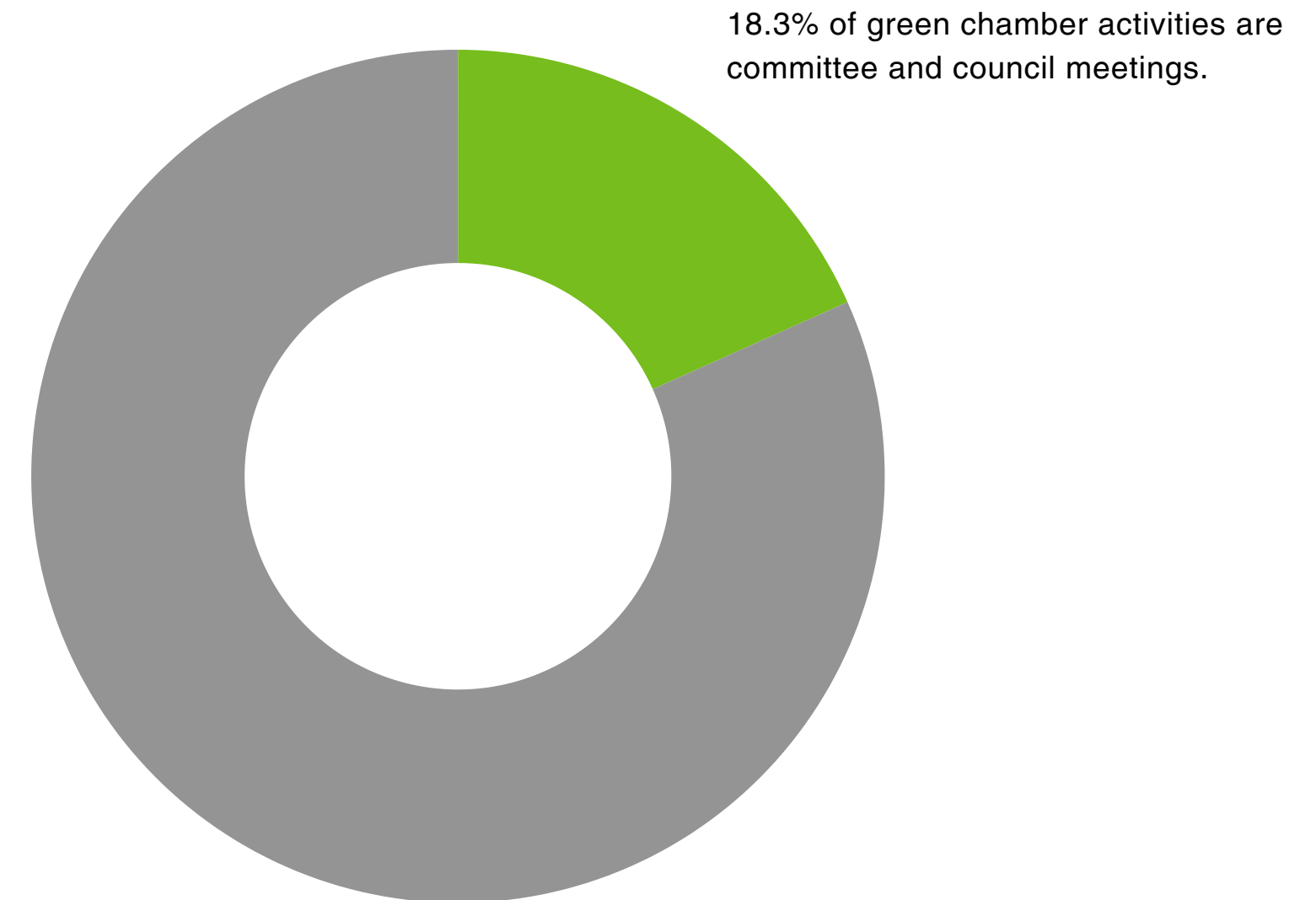
A donut chart illustrating the number of committees and council meetings compared to the number of other green chamber activities.

Committees and Councils - Formation

What is the process a chamber must undergo to form a green committee or council?

Forming a chamber committee typically involves appointing a board liaison, staff members, and volunteer members who all work towards achieving specific chamber sustainability goals outlined in mission statements and annual plans. Yearly plans include missions, objectives, and key steps planned by chambers as they achieve sustainability. As a result, chambers of commerce with green committees or councils can:

- Help provide resources to save business members money
- Gain a competitive edge in the green economy
- Better engage with community members and encourage community sustainability
- Mitigate environmental impacts by adopting sustainable practices
- Comply with ever-changing environmental regulations
- Attract younger members who care about sustainability

Furthermore, committees serve as a venue for chambers of commerce to identify and consider common issues regarding their topic of sustainability. This benefits businesses since hosting smaller-scale meetings on specific topics improves overall efficiency and organization. When given the space for environmental specialists to discuss strategy and swap advice, any subsequent sustainability issues or topics can be resolved quicker and with less debate.

Committees and Councils - Examples

The Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce's agricultural business and natural resources council is one example of a sustainability council.

Fremont Chamber members discussing in a conference room. Photo Courtesy of the Fremont Chamber website

Description of the Fremont Area Chamber's Work

The mission of the Agricultural Business and Natural Resources Council is to advocate for the development of agriculture enterprises, support local producers of regionally produced commodities, promote stewardship of natural resources, and educate the public regarding the importance of agriculture to the local Fremont economy. According to their website, some specific goals of this council are to:

- Educate chamber members, and elected and civic leaders regarding agriculture, production practices, and natural resources issues along with the tax implications to the Ag industry by hosting two seminars and an Ag tour during the summer months.
- Demonstrate appreciation to the agriculture community for its contribution to the Fremont area economy by hosting an event or activity during National Ag Week.
- Engage Ag producers and ag-related industries more fully in Fremont Chamber activities by hosting one winter event that addresses agricultural issues.

More information about the Fremont Area Chamber of Commerce and their other council and task forces can be found at https://www.fremontne.org/councils/.

Committees and Councils - Examples

Another chamber of commerce that has used its green committee to drive progress in the chamber and their larger community is the Tempe Chamber of Commerce.

Tempe Chamber's sustainability committee touring Culdesac, the nation's first car free community built from the ground up in Tempe. Photo courtesy the Tempe Chamber.

Description of the Tempe Chamber's Work

The Tempe Chamber's sustainability committee's purpose is to provide education and resources for their chamber members to become better informed about sustainable issues and to help them adopt or enhance sustainable practices on a long-term scale. This purpose is achieved by the Tempe chamber in many ways including:

- Advising chamber members about the most sustainable practices to create a healthy natural environment and economy.
- Standing at the forefront of driving long-term sustainability for chamber members and the business community.
- Creating an open environment for businesses to adopt sustainability.
- Ensure sustainability for future generations by finding a balance between economics and sustainability.

More information regarding the Tempe Chamber of Commerce and its sustainability committee can be found at https://business.tempechamber.org/eventcalendar/details/sustainability-committee-818811.

Mission Statements and Policy Platforms

In this subsection, we will discuss the committees and councils of chambers of commerce that focus on environmental issues. Because mission statements are able to unify employees and define business goals, they benefit chambers of commerce by keeping the organization focused on a common goal. In addition, effective mission statements continuously guide chambers in future situations by providing a template for decision-making based on the objectives and principles they previously defined. But, mission statements always need to be supported by the actions of the chamber.

In this subsection

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Mission Statements and Policy Platforms Summary

The third most popular environmental green activities are mission statements and policy platforms. Accounting for a total of 52 environmental programs, mission statements and policy platforms work together to define a business or chamber's purpose and objectives related to environmental policy and sustainability.

Description

The mission statements and policy platforms selected for this report are those that lead with a significant focus on protecting the environment versus those that have a statement of policy platform in place that prioritizes profit over sustainability.

17.6% of green chamber activities are mission statements and policy platforms.
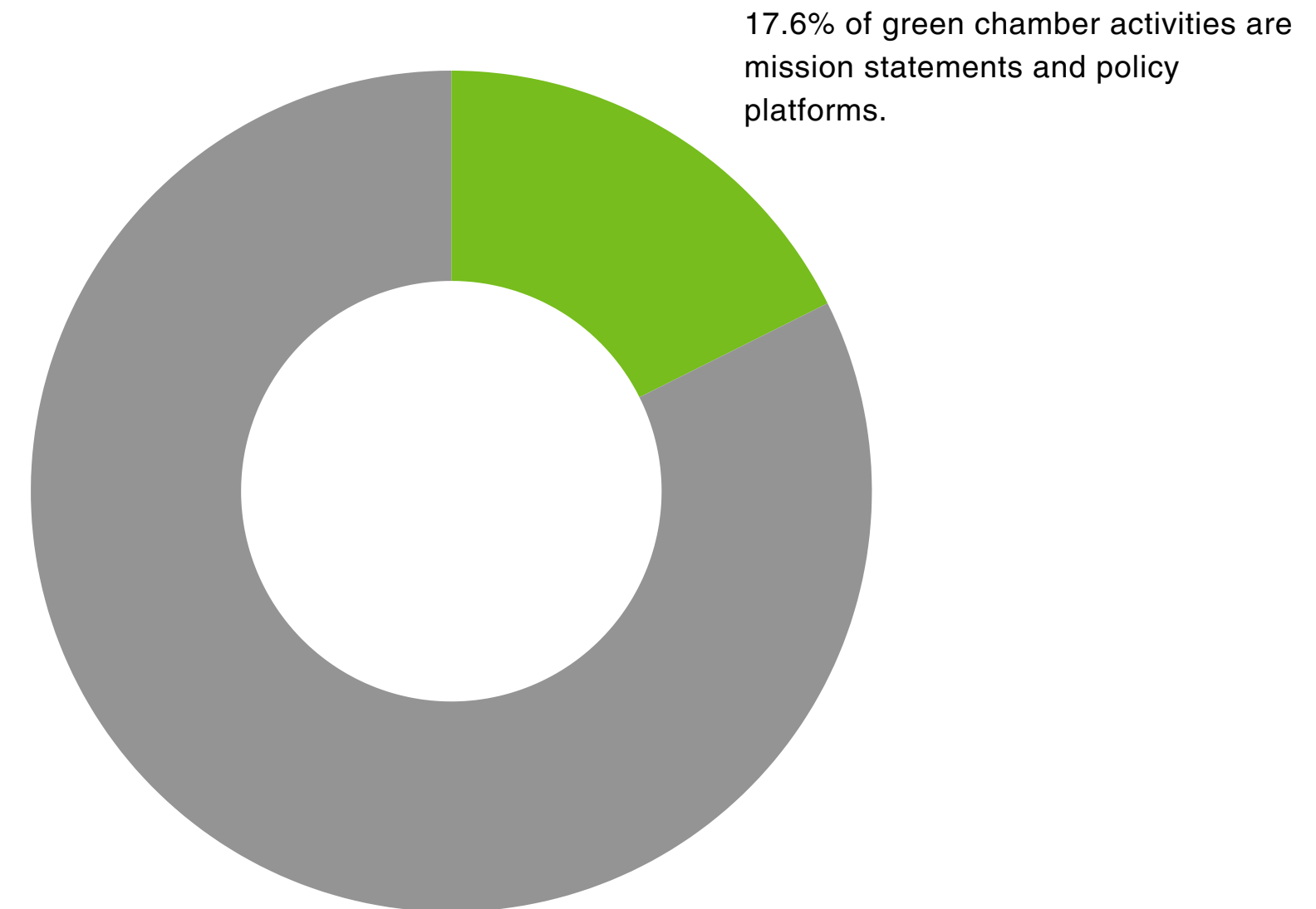
A donut chart illustrating the number of mission statements and policy platforms compared to the number of other green chamber activities.

Mission Statements

Mission statements are written for the purpose of communicating an organization's main objectives and values to employees, stakeholders, and customers.

The main roles of mission statements are specifically to inform stakeholders of the organization's purpose, develop goals to measure the organization's progress and inform strategy development. As a result, mission statements can define a business's goals and principles while also unifying employees around a central purpose. Common sustainability goals that are defined by mission statements include:

- Greenhouse gas emission reductions
- Affordable and sustainable energy transitions
- Waste use reduction via reuse and recycling
- Improvements in water quality

Mission Statements - Examples

The Foster City Chamber of Commerce is one example of a chamber of commerce that has used its mission statement to prioritize the protection of the environment.

Photo courtesy Foster City Chamber of Commerce

Description of the Foster City Chamber's Work

In their mission statement highlighted on their website, the Foster City Chamber states that,

"The Chamber is organized for the purpose of protecting, maintaining, promoting, and growing the economic and business resources in Foster City while enhancing the quality of life in the community and protecting its natural resources."

Foster City's emphasis on economic growth not at the expense of but in conjunction with the protection of natural resources commits the chamber to a sustainable path. By pledging its support of natural resource protections in its mission statement, Foster City takes a definite stance that is also communicated to its members, partners, and affiliates.

More information about the Foster City Chamber of Commerce and their business initiatives can be found at https://www.fostercitychamber.com/about-us/.

Mission Statements - Examples

One example of a chamber of commerce using a mission statement to guide future business decisions is the San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce.

An event photo from the San Luis Obispo Chamber's 117th Annual Dinner. Photo Courtesy of: San Luis Obispo Chamber's Instagram

Description of the San Luis Obispo Chamber's Work

"Imagine SLO" is a community economic vision developed by the chamber that guides future chamber strategic planning, resource investment, and long-term decision-making. A part of this guidance is provided by seven pillars that correspond with policy priorities and action plans. One such pillar is environmental stewardship, which, according to the SLO Chamber, refers to the importance of a sustainable economy that protects land and natural resources for now and future generations. The other pillars emphasized by Imagine SLO include:

- We Before Me: encouraging communication and coordination between neighborhoods
- Doers + Dreamers: advocacy for businesses and workers
- Love of Place: protecting the unique heritage and culture of SLO
- Empowering Innovation: supporting all innovators and entrepreneurs
- Lifelong Learning: helping employees and students build skills
- Creating Connection: fostering community wellness and diversity

Additional information about the SLO Chamber and its economic future can be found at https://slochamber.org/slo-chamber-reveals-its-vision-for-the-future-imagine-slo/.

Policy Platforms

Public policy platforms are also used to specify a chamber's agenda by highlighting the policies needed to achieve the goals outlined in their mission statement. Similarly to chambers with mission statements, chambers with clear legislative priorities improve their efficiency and motivation because they have committed their organization to established goals.

To be sustainable, these policies need to truly take the environment into account, as many traditional "Environmental and Energy policies" prioritized supporting business at the cost of the environment. Policy platforms are also used by chambers of commerce to highlight the work that their policy committees have done. By gathering chamber policy achievements and future goals into one platform, chambers can more efficiently communicate with their future members while also increasing public awareness of the current environmental issues affecting local chambers and the surrounding areas.

Common policy areas highlighted by chamber policy platforms include:
- Transportation and renewable energy
- Solid waste management
- Greenhouse gas emissions
- Sustainable city planning and management
- Climate Change Resiliency

Policy Platforms - Examples

The Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's website includes an extensive issues and advocacy section focused on many different topics.

Photo from the 2023 Climate Tech Resilience Program courtesy the Greater Miami Chamber

## Description of the Greater Miami Chamber's Work

In response to climate stressors faced by the Miami community such as hurricanes and sea-level rise, the Greater Miami Chamber developed a policy platform focused on resiliency. Their resilience page aims to engage government stakeholders to take action to protect the environment, natural resources, and community members from harm. To achieve these goals, the Greater Miami Chamber acts on different levels to raise awareness and support specific initiatives, including, according to their website:

- Enhance collaboration between business leaders, government, the not-for-profit sector, and academia
- Undertake viable ways and promote business opportunities that mitigate the impact of climate change on the future of the region
- Promote efforts to improve water quality, prevent saltwater intrusion, and protect our freshwater supply
- Support the restoration of the Biscayne Bay Ecosystem and Coral Reefs

More details about the Greater Miami Chamber of Commerce's policy initiatives can be found at https://www.miamichamber.com/committees/disruption/resilience.

Policy Platforms - Examples
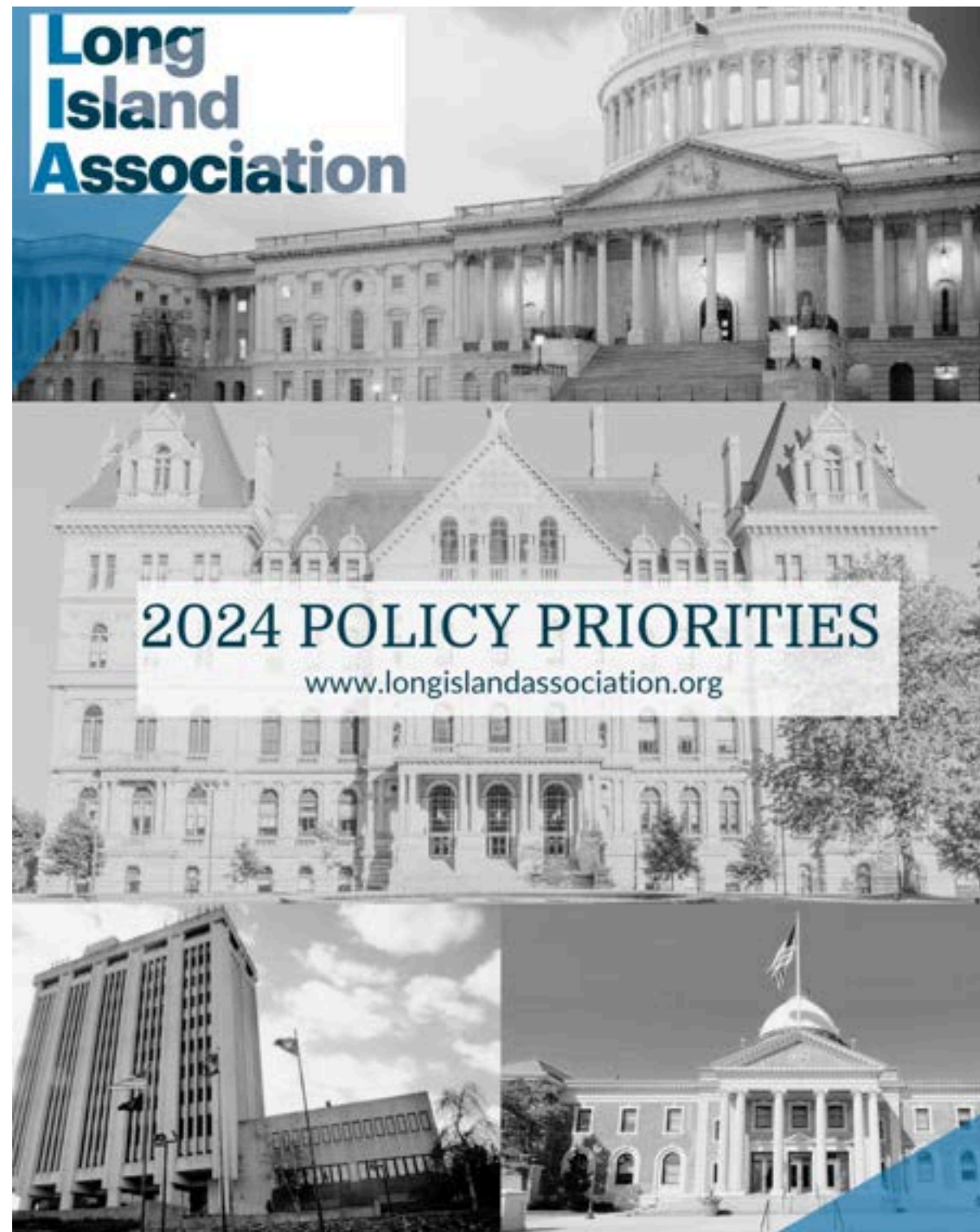
Description of the Long Island Association's Work

For 2024, the Long Island Association's top policy priorities are related to our existential crisis for affordability, addressing the cost of doing business and generating an economic return. For each priority listed, their page provides more detail in their advocacy agenda section about the specific actions taken by the Long Island Association. Some sustainability initiatives highlighted according to their website include:

- Keep offshore wind and renewable energy projects moving forward that will create jobs and decarbonize our energy mix
- Leverage funding from the New York State Environmental Bond Act to protect and improve Long Island's water quality and create green jobs.
- Develop a regional waste management solution.
- Modernize the electric transmission and distribution system to improve reliability and integrate renewable energy while limiting cost impacts.

A clear list of policy priorities such as the Long Island Association's is an effective way for chambers to raise awareness about local issues while also advocating on behalf of their businesses.

More information regarding the Long Island Association's policy priorities and advocacy initiatives is available at https://www.longislandassociation.org/policy-priorities/.

Policy Platforms - Examples

In addition, the San Diego Regional Chamber of Commerce has effectively used its policy platform to emphasize the chamber's policy priorities while also showcasing their efforts and accomplishments.

Photo courtesy of the San Diego Regional Chamber website's policy page.

Description of the San Diego Regional Chamber's Work

The San Diego Regional Chamber outlines several policy priorities on its website that include environmental issues along with supporting local businesses and workforces. Some examples include:

- Cost-effectively reducing greenhouse gas emissions
- Recycling more water to improve regional water systems
- Strengthening the workforce by connecting education and business

To support these priorities, the chamber emphasizes that they serve as a leading policy advocate via the work of their committees and policy campaigns. Most importantly, the San Diego Regional Chamber boasts a "member-driven policy", meaning that chamber members contribute to chamber advocacy through committee work, city council volunteering, PAC support, and engagement with elected officials regarding current issues. By highlighting that the strength of the San Diego Regional Chamber comes from its members, they encourage businesses or employees to join their mission and make a difference.

More information about the San Diego Regional Chamber's policy platform can be found at https://sdchamber.org/policy/.

Social

In this section, we will provide a review of chamber activities that focus on social sustainability. We will explore the most popular social activities they undertake, highlighting how these programs are developed and the numerous benefits they offer to businesses and communities.
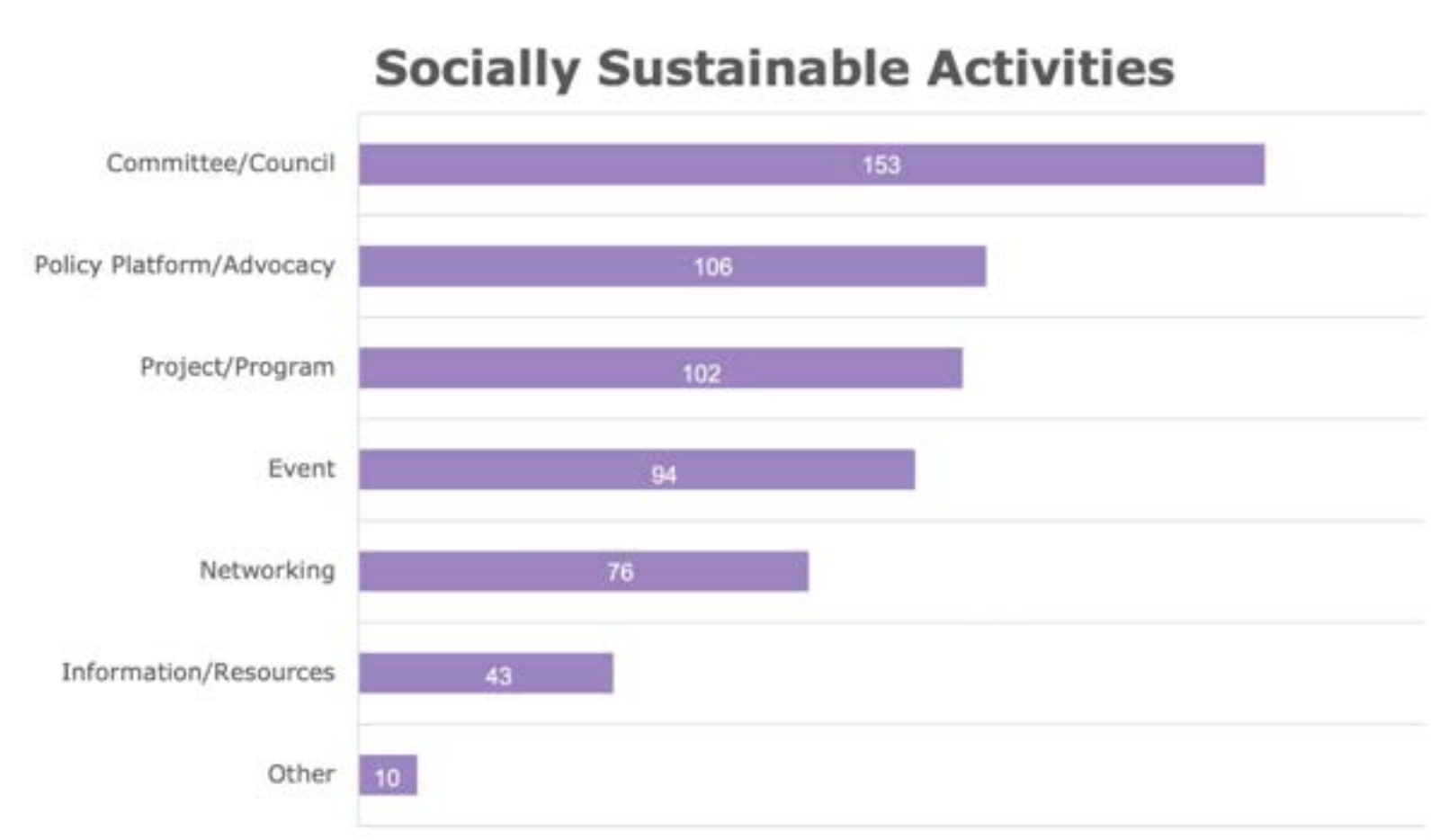
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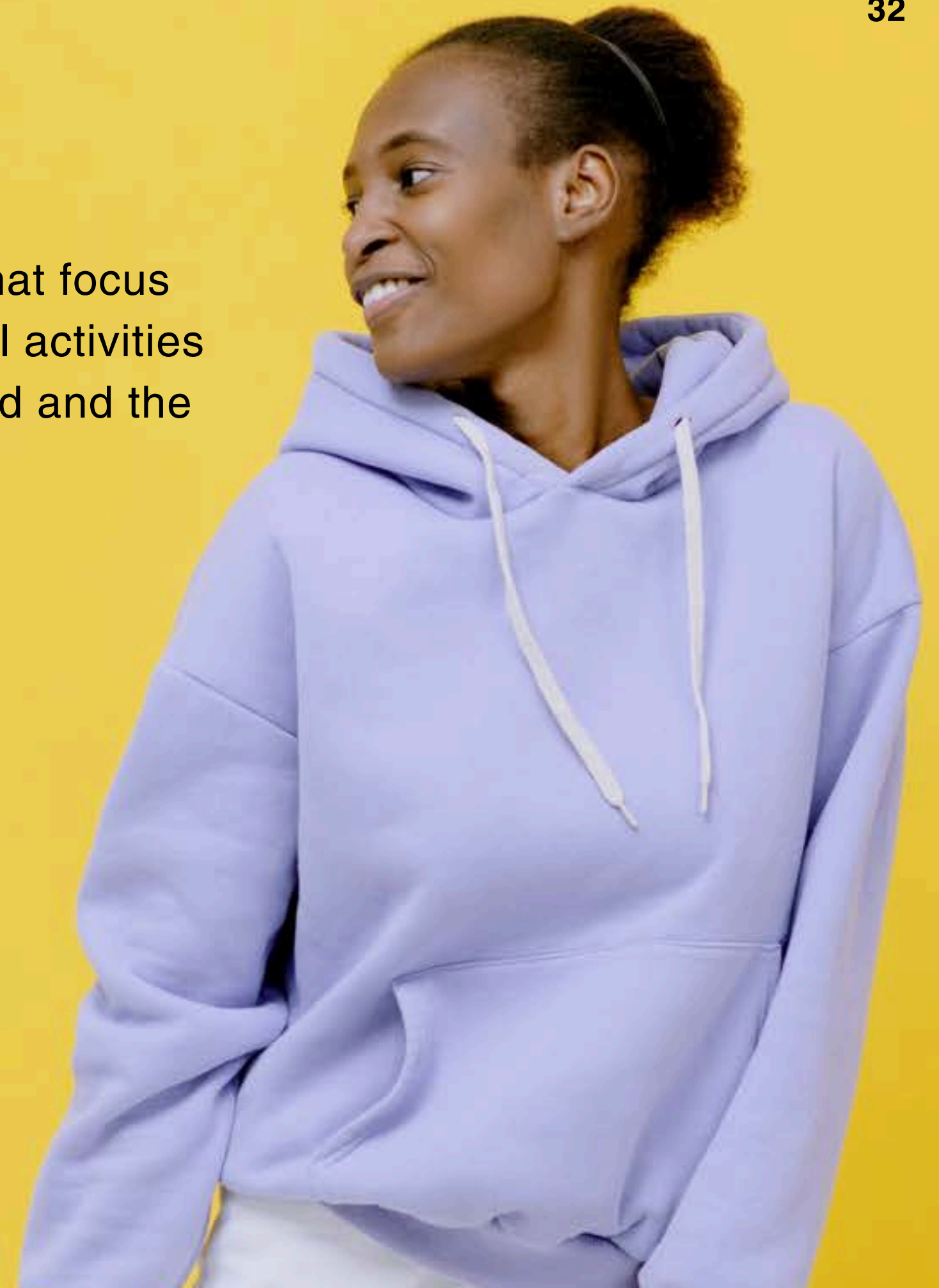
Social Overview

In a systematic review of 584 chambers that have programs focused on social sustainability via manual search from the 7400+ chambers, the most popular programs include committees and council meetings, policy platforms and advocacy, and projects and programs.

Socially Sustainable Activities

Activity	Count
Committee/Council	153
Policy Platform/Advocacy	106
Project/Program	102
Event	94
Networking	76
Information/Resources	43
Other	10

A chart showing the number of chambers that implemented each type of social activity.

What Chambers Have Done

Environmental sustainability is not the only form of sustainability that chambers of commerce are striving to achieve; social sustainability, defined as initiatives that encourage organizations to create equitable and welcoming environments inside and outside their business, is rising among chambers of commerce. In a systematic review of 549 chambers that have programs focused on social sustainability via manual search from the 7400+ chambers, the most popular programs include committees and council meetings, policy platforms and advocacy, and projects and programs.

Through these activities, chambers that develop their social sustainability gain a better sense of community, empower employees, attract new business partners, and fight for social justice.

Committees and Councils

In this subsection, we will discuss the types of committees and councils that chambers have implemented. After each program, we will share some recommendations for chambers or businesses on best practices.

In this subsection

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Committees and Councils Summary

Committees and council meetings are the most popular type of socially sustainable chamber activity, accounting for 153 total programs. Socially sustainable business councils and committees are broadly categorized as focused on women in business or more generally promoting diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in organizations.

Types of Committees and Councils

This section will cover two main types of social committees and councils, including:

1. Women in Business
2. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

28% of social chamber activities are committees and councils.
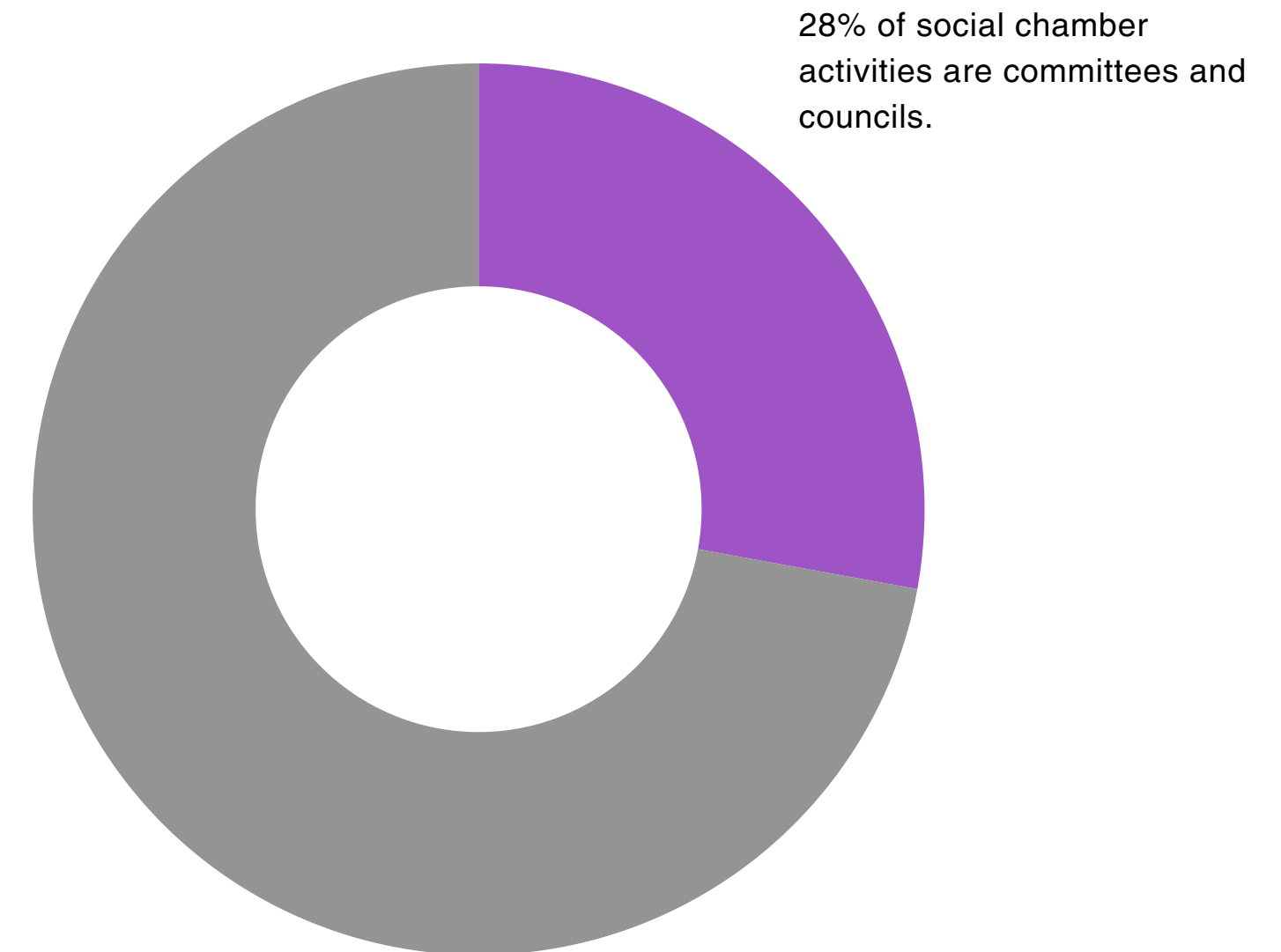
A donut chart illustrating the number of committees and councils compared to the number of other social chamber activities.

Committees and Councils - Women in Business

Most chambers of commerce have women's programs focused on supporting and uplifting women's voices but forming women in business committees and councils pledge chambers to an exceptional level of support that goes beyond the standard.

Committees and councils centered around encouraging women in business represent 80 total socially sustainable activities. Women in business committees and councils focus on providing women with resources to connect with others and succeed which makes workforces and communities stronger. Common resources given to women as part of these committees include executive education, networking, procurement opportunities, training, and financial support.

Committees and Councils - Women in Business

The Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce is one chamber that has taken the initiative to support and foster connections between women in business.

NKY Chamber's Women's Initiative 2024 Annual Breakfast, "Unbridled Strength: Women in Motion." Photo courtesy the NKY Chamber

Description of the Northern Kentucky Chamber's Work

The Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's larger Women's Initiative has the mission of providing opportunities for women in Northern Kentucky (NKY) and Greater Cincinnati to grow, connect, and achieve professional success. Programs available to the public through this council include:

- Annual breakfast event to recognize professional achievements and contributions
- Annual award programs to honor women who show outstanding work and service in NKY
- Biannual professional development panels regarding various business topics
- Monthly women's networking events to foster connections
- All-day regional summits for women in all career stages to gain inspiration
- Mentorship programs for career growth over the course of a year

These initiatives create a welcoming environment for women to create connections, receive encouragement and inspiration, and celebrate their accomplishments. More information about the Northern Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's business operations and resources can be found at https://www.nkychamber.com/services/women-s-initiative/.

Committees and Councils - Women in Business

One chamber of commerce that provides financial support for local women in business in addition to networking opportunities is the of Commerce.

Photo of the San Rafael Chamber's Women of Industry Awards. Courtesy of the San Rafael Chamber's website.

Description of the San Rafael Chamber's Work

As a part of their Women in Industry Committee, the San Rafael Chamber hosts many events that support and recognize the efforts of local women, including running a women's empowerment blog, a Women of Industry award to recognize the achievements of local businesswomen, and a Women's Empowerment series which have taught women about innovation and success.

Furthermore, the Women in Industry Committee hosts an annual luncheon that honors one businesswoman who is "demonstrating excellence in her field while significantly impacting the community and beyond". Not only is this luncheon a venue to uplift and encourage local business women, but all the proceeds raised at these luncheons fund a scholarship for one woman to attend the San Rafael Leadership Institute, which offers rising professionals the opportunity to foster relationships with local key stakeholders and to gain leadership experience.

More information regarding the San Rafael Chamber of Commerce and the San Rafael Leadership Institute can be found at https://srchamber.com/strategic-plan-committees.

Committees and Councils - DEI

The remaining 51 committee and council meetings are focused primarily on fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in different chambers.

DEI committees focus on providing opportunities for people of all races, religions, sexualities, genders, and cultures. As a result, DEI committees create an inclusive and welcoming environment that fosters a diverse range of perspectives and experiences. Having an inclusive environment is beneficial for employees, but according to LinkedIn, companies with DEI initiatives have a 25% greater likelihood of outperforming peers.

Many chambers have adopted DEI committees because investing in diversity builds an organization's brands, helps increase recruitment opportunities, promotes team productivity, and extends market reach. These opportunities improve chambers' environmental impact and economic profit because diverse teams can create a wider range of innovative strategies that result from a higher level of creativity present in homogenous teams. Formally, creating a DEI committee or council typically involves:

1. Identifying support from chambers and DEI advocates
2. Establishing the committee after defining its purpose and mission
3. Developing an action plan based on relevant data and time-bound goals
4. Launching initiatives such as;
   a. Diversity Workshops and Training
   b. Inclusive Networking Events
   c. Mentorship and Sponsorship Programs
   d. Leadership Development Initiatives
   e. Recruitment Events
   f. Cultural Celebrations
   g. Diversity Awards
5. Establishing continuous evaluations while celebrating achievements

Committees and Councils - DEI

One chamber of commerce that has taken the initiative to create a leading DEI committee is the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce.

Photo from Alaska Black Business Expo. Photo courtesy the Anchorage Chamber.

Description of the Anchorage Chamber's Work

The Anchorage Chamber created a diversity program with a vision board stating their commitment to "... a growing membership of businesses representing the diversity of our community business owners and entrepreneurs". To achieve this vision, the Anchorage Chamber formed a diversity committee whose members supply advice and support for the development of DEI programs. In addition, the Anchorage Chamber's DEI resource page provides inspiration and guidance for businesses and chambers so that DEI values are reflected in their operations.

Starting conversations about DEI in chambers of commerce does not also have to accompany the creation of a board or committee; chambers can encourage DEI in their organization by stating their support in mission statements and providing resources and initiatives for different groups, including women and minorities. However, DEI statements by themself are insufficient; It is important for chambers to go beyond pledging their support in mission statements and to actually provide support through learning opportunities and incentives.

To learn more about how chambers can embrace DEI initiatives and about the Anchorage Chamber of Commerce, visit https://www.anchoragechamber.org/diversity-inclusion/.

Committees and Councils - DEI

An example of a chamber with a strong DEI mission statement accompanied with programs is the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce.

Photo of the Loudoun Chamber's 2023 DEIA Summit. Courtesy of the Loudoun Chamber Instagram.

Description of the Loudoun County Chamber's Work

The Loudoun Chamber's DEI committee operates with the mission to build "an equitable and inclusive business environment". In order to achieve this goal, the Loudoun Chamber uses toolkits, committee meetings, and mission statements.

The Loudoun Chamber has a page on its website dedicated to its "Statement of Values on Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Accessibility", which emphasizes the importance of implementing DEI in chambers in order to advance economic growth, innovation, education, and inclusion.

The Loudoun Chamber provides additional opportunities to educate members on DEIA topics through DEIA toolkits. DEIA toolkits are provided to businesses to educate them and provide the resources they need to help incorporate DEI values into their practices. This culminates in the chamber's annual DEIA Summit Programs while give attendees the opportunity to network, learn from keynote speakers and panelists, and have open discussions in a wide variety of workshops.

To learn more about how chambers can embrace DEI initiatives and about the Loudoun County Chamber of Commerce, visit https://www.loudounchamber.org/

Policy Platforms and Advocacy Programs

In this subsection, we will discuss the policy platforms and advocacy programs that chambers have implemented. After each program, we will share some recommendations for chambers or businesses on best practices.

In this subsection

Policy Platforms and Advocacy Programs Summary

The second most popular type of socially sustainable programs, standing at 106 activities, are policy platforms and advocacy programs. Public policy advocacy is a space for chambers to articulate their beliefs and support for various policies via lobbying, public education, forming relationships with decision-makers, and legal advocacy. Ranging from policy pages to advocacy programs that take political initiatives, policy platforms and advocacy programs are a strong way for chambers to drive progress.

Summary

This section will cover two types of social programs:

1. Policy Platforms
2. Advocacy Programs

19.3% of social chamber activities are policy platforms and advocacy programs.
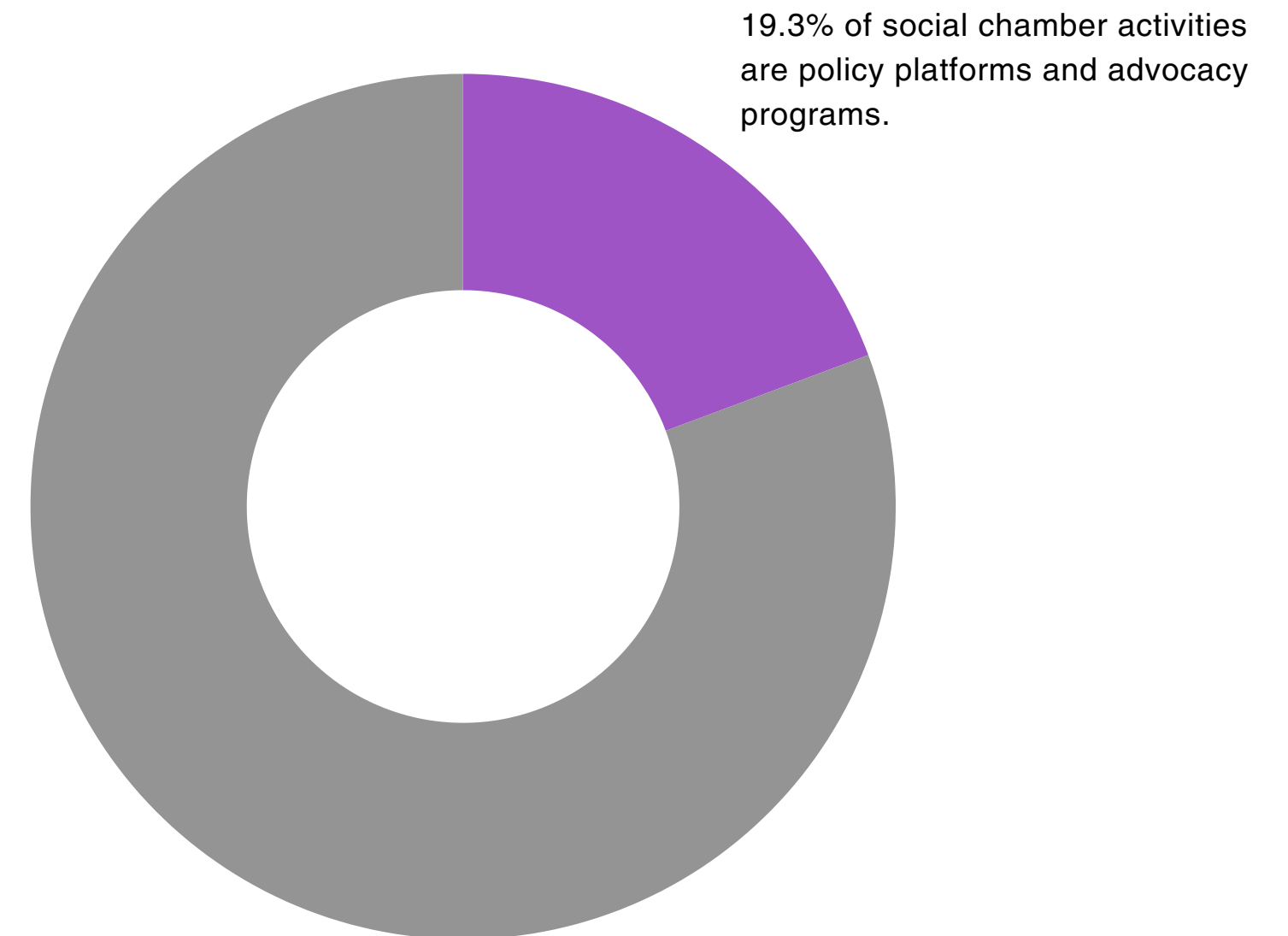
A donut chart illustrating the number of policy platforms and advocacy programs compared to the number of other social chamber activities.

Policy Platforms

Public policy platforms are also used to specify a chamber's agenda by highlighting the policies needed to achieve the goals outlined in their mission statement.

Similarly to chambers with sustainability focused mission statements, chambers with clear legislative priorities improve their efficiency and motivation because they have committed their organization to established goals. Common social sustainability focused policies highlighted by chamber policy platforms include:

- Accessible public housing
- Entrepreneurial and networking resources for business owners
- Racial justice and economic equity
- Public transportation

Policy platforms are also used by chambers of commerce to highlight the work that their policy committees have done. By gathering chamber policy achievements and future goals for their social sustainability initiatives into one platform, chambers can more efficiently communicate to their longstanding and future members while also increasing public awareness of the current social issues affecting local chambers and the surrounding areas.

In addition, chambers with clear legislative priorities can better serve as a voice for local businesses. By keeping an updated list of public policy priorities for each legislative session, chambers make it clear to legislators what local employees are expecting from Congress, state legislature, or city councils.

Policy Platforms - Examples

The San Francisco (SF) Chamber of Commerce is one representation of a chamber with a comprehensive policy platform.

SF Chamber's "Yes SF" Urban sustainability challenge which commits resources towards sustainable economic growth for SF. Photo courtesy the SF Chamber

Description of the San Francisco Chamber's Work

Outlined in their public policy and advocacy page, the SF Chamber provides leadership on the issues important to businesses by connecting with lawmakers through delegate trips to local, state, and federal capitals to shape public policy. In addition, the SF Chamber has established a legislative agenda that educates its members and guides their policy action. Some key topics highlighted in their legislative agenda include support for economic prosperity through business regulations such as insurance against overabundance, sustaining the success of small businesses, and the fair implementation of business taxes.

Furthermore, they also establish their support for a more efficient transportation network through infrastructure investment, improving public transit, and employer-sponsored transit. In order to spur economic growth, the SF Chamber advances projects that sustain economic growth including supporting a clean economy, approval of affordable housing, business attraction and retention programs, and other initiatives that create jobs in green tech and protect the environment.

More information about the San Francisco Chamber of Commerce's mission and policy initiatives can be found at https://sfchamber.com/advocacy/.

Policy Platforms - Examples

In addition, the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce's public policy agenda is another example of a chamber of commerce with an exceptional outline of their policy priorities.

Toledo Chamber's 2023 Capitol Conversations in Columbus with Lydia Mihalik, Director of the Ohio Department of Development. Photo courtesy the Toledo Chamber.

Description of the Toledo Regional Chamber's Work

Compiled in their annual Public Policy Agenda report, the Toledo Regional Chamber shares a list of their community's top legislative priorities and represents the beliefs of the chamber's collective membership. The goals of this report and its policy platform are to advocate on behalf of its members, advise lawmakers, and act as a convener for regional problems. Some important issues addressed in the report include:

- Taxes and Regulatory reform to promote economic growth with clear regulations
- Efficient transportation systems that are affordable and efficient
- Providing resources to further workforce diversity and comprehensive education
- Energy production co-existing with clean environmental and economic growth

Each section of the Public Policy Agenda report provides specific policy recommendations and suggestions for Ohio's state and regional governments.

A more detailed overview of the Toledo Regional Chamber of Commerce's public policy platform as well as a link to the report can be found at https://www.toledochamber.com/publicpolicyagenda.html.

Advocacy Programs

The promotion of specific public policies or causes is also a form of advocacy.

17 socially sustainable chambers searched have dedicated pages informing visitors about their chamber's sustainability-focused advocacy work and priorities. Advocacy groups range from community grassroots movements to private business associations, but their purpose remains the same; to make progress toward supporting social or environmental issues by increasing awareness. Common causes targeted by advocacy groups include:

- Protection of vulnerable and underrepresented communities
- Women's equality in business
- Minority diversity and inclusion
- Local economic growth and job stability

Advocacy Programs - Examples

The Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce's public policy committee researches issues impacting the Santa Barbara community and then takes action via advocacy letters.

ETech Roundtable: The Chamber's Technology and Manufacturing Committee holds quarterly roundtable discussions with local representatives and leaders to discuss energy resiliency, workforce development, and other initiatives benefiting the technology and manufacturing industry. Photo Courtesy the SBSCC.

Description of the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber's Work

Chamber advocacy efforts are also important for chambers to represent local community and business interests. The Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber of Commerce's public policy committee researches issues impacting the Santa Barbara community and then takes action via advocacy letters. Typically directed towards assembly appropriations committees, project planning committees, and city councils, advocacy letters state Chamber support for different proposed policies or community projects. By highlighting the positive or negative impact that policies or projects will have on local communities, the chamber amplifies the voice of its members while increasing awareness about local social or inequality issues. Ranging from library funding requests to electric vehicle charging projects, advocacy letters are a crucial method for chambers to take action on behalf of their community.

More information regarding the Santa Barbara South Coast Chamber's advocacy letters and the additional advocacy work they achieve via roundtables and bill endorsements can be found at https://sbscchamber.com/advocate/public-policy/.

Projects and Programs

In this subsection, we will discuss the projects and programs that chambers have implemented. After each program, we will share some recommendations for chambers or businesses on best practices.

In this subsection

Projects and Programs Summary

Socially sustainable projects and programs are the third most popular type of chamber activity. Accounting for 102 activities, social programs, and projects are opportunities for Chambers to promote social development in their local community by providing resources and building networking connections. Manifested through both programs and projects, these social initiatives are opportunities for chambers to create meaningful impacts starting from the local scale.

Summary

This sub-section will cover both:

52   Social Programs

54   Social Projects

15% of social chamber activities are policy platforms and advocacy programs.
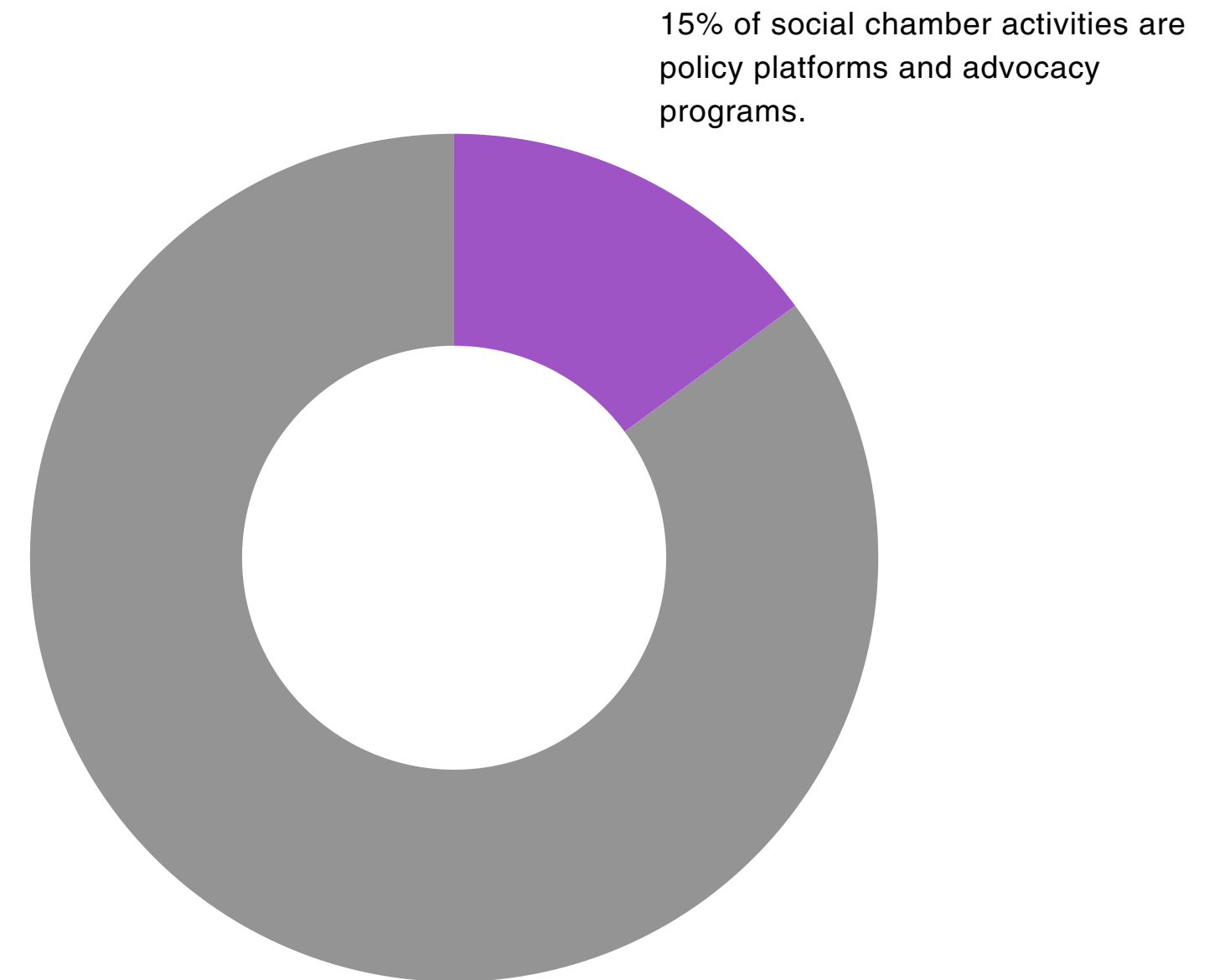
A donut chart illustrating the number of projects and programs compared to the number of other social chamber activities.

Social Programs

Social programs are the more popular form of social activity over social projects.

Social programs are the dominant form of social activity over social projects. Chamber programs targeting social issues are venues for Chambers to provide both members and non-members with the resources and opportunities they need. Social programs are typically established by federal governments to provide aid and assistance, but chambers of commerce additionally use them to create empowerment and foster knowledge. Common areas covered by social projects include:

- DEI initiatives
- Women in business and leadership
- Minority and youth leadership
- Community education
- Addressing homelessness

Social Programs - Examples

One example of a minority and youth leadership program belongs to the Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber of Commerce.

The 2023 honorees of the Finest Under 40's recognition program for rising professionals, planned and implemented by Uplift LA. Photo courtesy the Auburn Metropolitan Chamber.

Description of the Lewiston Auburn Metropolitan Chamber's Work

As part of their larger business development initiative that helps local businesses grow, one program called Uplift LA has been dedicated to providing opportunities to the next generation of business and community leaders for over 15 years. Major opportunities provided by this program include:

- Monthly networking events
- Development seminars and workshops
- Group volunteer activities.

In addition, Uplift LA encourages young professionals to grow their careers by recognizing and awarding the work of "The Finest Under 40", a group of community members who are annually honored for their outstanding contributions.

More information about the Auburn Metropolitan Chamber and Uplift La can be found at https://upliftlamaine.com/.

Social Projects

Social projects are an additional noteworthy way for Chambers to address local social issues impacting their community. While social programs are a collection of collaborative efforts to resolve larger-scale local issues, projects are single efforts by Chambers that focus on community crises as they arise.
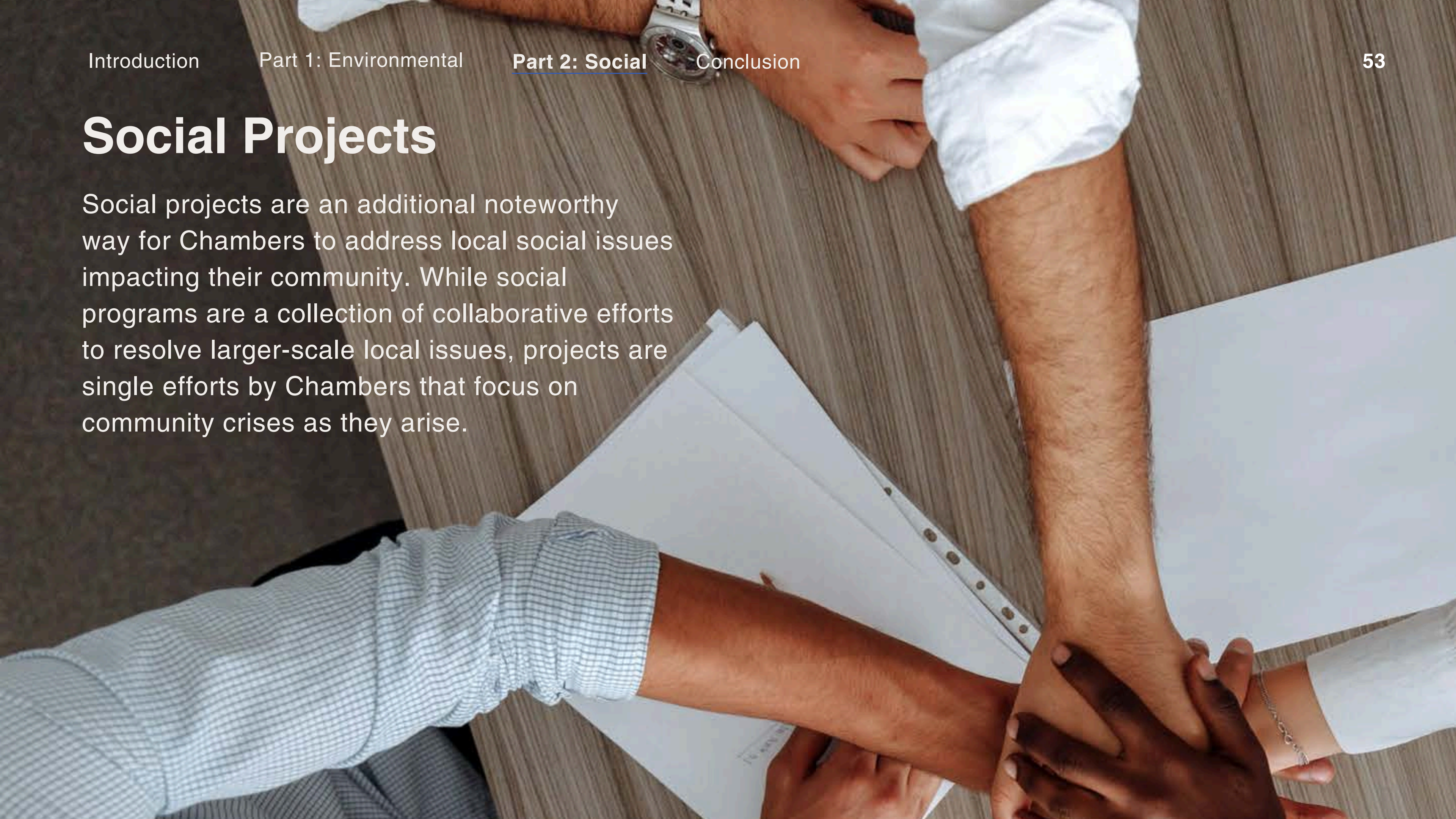
Social Projects - Examples

In addition, the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce has developed social projects to spur community development.

Eugene Area Chamber's Community Solutions Summit ½ day conference developed by the BLTF and Brain Trust. Photo courtesy the Eugene Area Chamber.

Description of the Eugene Area Chamber's Work

One of their most notable social projects is their homelessness initiatives designed to end homelessness. After an initial homelessness report in 2022, the Eugene Area Chamber prioritized making housing and emergency shelters more affordable, sustaining wellness through "wrap-around services" such as substance abuse support, and the need for collective action and agreement regarding how to end homelessness. These findings eventually resulted in Eugene Chamber's community plan and business leaders task force (BLTF). The shared community plan, while still under development, aims to unite the community of Lane County's elected officials, organizations, neighborhoods, churches, academia, and both housed and unhoused people in a shared regional plan because the homeless crisis is too complex for only one group to address. In addition, the BLTF is a group of over 100 local business owners that provide resources and support to the public. To create action, the BLTF created 4 committees that focus on sharing and pursuing new data, creating a communications hub, encouraging accountability in community culture, and workforce development.

More information about the Eugene Area Chamber of Commerce and its fight for permanent solutions for homelessness can be found at https://www.eugenechamber.com/homelessnessinitiative.html.

Social Projects - Examples

Code of Conduct Poster courtesy of the Riverwind Foundation

Description of the Jackson Hole Chamber's Work

The Jackson Hole Chamber's "Local Initiatives" page is a great example of how chambers of commerce can support and partner with local community projects such as the Jackson Hole Code of Conduct. Promoting social projects helps chambers improve their community by raising awareness about sustainable initiatives that they can participate in and emulate. Chambers of commerce don't have to take the lead in establishing projects; Partnerships with existing programs such as this are a vital avenue for chambers to aid further progress.

To guide their community towards environmental stewardship and social responsibility, the Riverwind Foundation led the initiative to create the Jackson Hole Sustainability Code of Conduct and partnered with the Jackson Hole Chamber of Commerce. The Code of Conduct is a community involvement project with local high schools and organizations that engaged over 230 students and 57 businesses in lessons teaching a sustainability code of conduct which included wisdom, harmony, and zero waste by teaching community members to:
- Treasure wildlife and wildlands
- Maintain a spirit balance for oneself and the ecosystem
- Refuse production that creates waste
- Learn how to recycle and reuse when they can

As a result, this code of conduct creates greater awareness and education about sustainability for students, residents, visitors, businesses, and government agencies. More information about the Jackson Hole Chamber and the work done by the Riverwind Foundation can be found at https://www.jacksonholechamber.com/plan-your-visit/sustainability/local-initiatives/.

Conclusion

In this subsection, we will conclude this report with an overview of its purpose in addition to a page with next steps any business or chamber can take to follow the sustainable initiatives and precedent set by the chambers highlighed in this report.

In this subsection

Next Steps

Visit U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce's website to access our toolkits for more information.

U.S. Green Chamber's Toolkits

The main purpose of this report is to raise awareness about the current state of sustainability amongst chambers of commerce while highlighting room for growth. And while it is important for chambers and businesses to be aware of how important environmental and social sustainability is, this knowledge alone is not enough. It is equally important for chambers and businesses to be provided with resources to guide them on the next steps on their path toward a sustainable future.

Your next steps for achieving sustainability may seem daunting, so the U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce is providing informative toolkits. Ranging from waste management to energy efficiency, the U.S. Green Chamber provides guidance for chambers and businesses to participate in sustainability initiatives. The U.S. Green Chamber of Commerce has created three free toolkits on creating green committees, DEI initiatives, and lobbying tactics.

Click here to access your FREE Toolkits:

https://usgreenchamber.com/chamber_toolkits/

End Notes

Summary

This report explored the current state of chamber sustainability by measuring the social and environmental activities conducted by chambers. The main findings from this report are that both social and environmental sustainability are achieved by chambers with the establishment of committees and councils and policy and advocacy statements. In addition, green business programs coupled with social programs and projects represent the majority of the remaining activities.

Chambers of Commerce from all across the nation have created unique programs centered around their local communities to create change in the business sphere and daily lives. Varying from providing resources to education and awareness programs, sustainability initiatives are being used to create a positive impact for many.

Given the benefits of sustainability activities to chambers, businesses, communities, and the environment, we encourage all chambers to learn more about local initiatives to partner with or to gather resources to begin their own programs to start making a real difference in your communities. We hope to encourage other chambers to take inspiration from the range of examples we have provided for every sustainability activity.

This report establishes a baseline on the current state of sustainability of national Chambers of Commerce to promote inspiration and awareness.

Thank You

For more information about the U.S. Green Chamber, call or visit

https://usgreenchamber.com/   info@usgreenchamber.com