Accomplishments in 2016

Boosting the Voice and Power of Business for a Sustainable Economy

In ASBC’s first eight years, we built a resilient foundation to promote sustainable business practices and public policies. In 2016, our progress on key initiatives helped shift the national conversation on “what business wants.” It also demonstrated that many businesses are eager to advocate for policies consistent with their view that financial success is linked to exemplary environmental and workplace practices. Given the election results, ASBC’s role as catalyst has become even more important. We will persist in making the case that America’s market economy and democratic political system depend on a framework of sustainability – and that ASBC and its business members have a critical role in helping to shape our present and future.

In 2016, on climate and energy issues, we pushed for the U.S. signing of the historic Paris Accord, advancement of the Clean Power Plan and government support for the transition to renewables. On toxic chemicals, after eight years of work by ASBC and our Companies for Safer Chemicals Coalition, we saw passage of the Lautenberg Chemical Safety Act that made significant improvements to our dangerously outdated chemical policy. On sustainable workplaces, our High Road Workplace campaigns for paid leave and family leave, and our work on fair pay with Business for a Fair Minimum Wage, resulted in legislative victories across the country. With strategic interventions and full-scale campaigns, we also made the sustainable business case for worker ownership, fair tax policy, small business capital access, clean water, sustainable agriculture, diversity and inclusion, gender equity, and more.

Throughout the year, company executives connected with like-minded leaders in ASBC, and allied business groups across the country boosted their impact through joint campaigns with us. Along with high-profile work on the national level, we expanded our state-level influence by incubating new business organizations as well as supporting our current members’ state organizations. In 2017, this state-level impact will be even more valuable.

This report highlights the 2016 accomplishments of the American Sustainable Business Council family of organizations, made up of the American Sustainable Business Council, and the American Sustainable Business Institute. The Council, a 501(c)(4) entity, advocates for policy change at the federal and state levels to support a more sustainable economy. It comprises a growing network of businesses and business associations across the United States, which in turn represents over 250,000 individual businesses. The Institute, a 501(c)(3) entity, educates and informs the public and policy makers about the benefits of a more sustainable economy, and about policies and practices that can help the economy become more sustainable.
In 2016, ASBC recruited more than 50 additional companies and business organizations committed to the sustainable business movement. Our membership grew in size and participation, impacting America’s views of what business wants government to do and how markets function best. Our promotion of the triple bottom line perspective and values is steadily helping policymakers understand that groups like the U.S. Chamber of Commerce do not speak for all business leaders. ASBC worked intensively to help our members engage and educate policymakers, including giving testimony before Congress and state legislatures. We also published credible polls, reports and op-eds in major media – and media interest in our work has resulted in many more requests for interviews. In these ways and more, ASBC influenced policy by changing how issues are discussed and understood.

Despite the rancorous 2016 election season, ASBC built working relationships with legislators across party lines to bridge business and sustainability needs. ASBC-hosted events at both the Democratic and Republican conventions were followed by pragmatic policy sessions and Capitol Hill visits throughout the year and during SustyBiz, ASBC’s annual Sustainable Business Summit in September.

The November election results made clear that we must redouble our efforts to make the business case for a sustainable economy. To win a place at the tables where decisions are made, we will activate many more business leaders to speak effectively on the issues. With them, we will push public policies that incentivize business models to foster broad-based prosperity, national resilience and a sustainable economy.

“To keep the economy growing, we need policies that help workers and communities thrive. The work the American Sustainable Business Council is doing to build an economy that works for everyone is so important and vital to our country.”

~U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand | D-NY

ASBC member Julie Gorte of Pax World Funds testifies before the Massachusetts state legislature in support of a price on carbon.
Building the High Road Workplace

In 2016, ASBC maintained a close watch on the ever-changing relationship between employers and workers and on how responsible companies handle this dynamic to ensure sustainable operations. To support this work, we launched the High Road Workplace Project; a national campaign that encourages firms to adopt and scale high-road workplace practices and calls for policymakers’ support. Launched in September 2016 with a formal announcement by then-U.S. Deputy Secretary of Labor Chris Lu, ASBC’s campaign quickly attracted nearly 100 companies to endorse our Principles of High Road Employers.

To push the national conversation on how public policy and market-based incentives can foster high-road business practices, ASBC held policy roundtables in San Francisco and Ventura, CA, Denver, and New Hampshire; others are planned for 2017. ASBC also worked closely with U.S. Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (NY) and members of the House to build support for a national paid leave bill, the FAMILY Act; and with U.S. Senator Patty Murray (WA) on her Healthy Families Act that would let workers earn up to 56 hours of sick time per year.

ASBC sought and publicized comments from business leaders proving their support for high-road regulations, including the Overtime Rule and Paid Sick Time for Federal Contractors Rule. While the Overtime Rule remains tied up in the courts, the Paid Sick Rule was finalized in September and took effect January 1, 2017, guaranteeing more than a million people the right to earn paid sick leave for the first time. At the state level, ASBC members’ support helped pass landmark paid family and medical leave legislation in New York and Washington, D.C. We also supported successful paid sick time legislation and ballot initiatives in cities and states across the country including Chicago, Minnesota, Washington, and Arizona. Working with Business for a Fair Minimum Wage, ASBC also supported legislative campaigns and ballot initiatives for higher wages in a number of other states, many of which won.
Incentivizing Clean Energy and Protecting the Climate

In both Washington, D.C. and state capitals, ASBC persisted in making the business case that climate change is a fundamental threat to our economy. We countered continued resistance from the oil and gas industry and far-right climate change deniers with our sustained education and advocacy effort. ASBC worked across the aisle to argue that continued dependence on fossil fuels will provoke more extreme weather incidents, increase insurance costs, threaten supply chains and disrupt sales. We took the lead to advocate for the Clean Power Plan, promote energy efficiency, oppose fracking, and support the Divest Invest movement against pension funds in fossil fuels. We launched the “Put a Price on Carbon” campaign that articulated a set of principles, attracted hundreds of business signatures to a sign-on letter, and conducted a series of webinars with the Brookings Institution, World Resources Institute, R Street and members of Congress. We held forums on climate initiatives for businesses across the country in AZ, KY, NH and MA and partnered with the National Caucus of Environmental Legislators to support carbon pricing legislation at the state level. We also recruited and helped ASBC business members present testimony to Congressional committees and state legislatures.

ASBC advocated for Senator Whitehouse’s Carbon Fee bill and for Congressman Delaney’s Tax Pollution bill – two of our many efforts in 2016 to advance government policies, regulations and incentives spurring the U.S. transition to a low-carbon economy. Our mobilization of businesses to oppose the Keystone pipeline contributed to President Obama’s decision to terminate the project.

ASBC proved our commitment to exploring all solutions by organizing a half-day Policy Forum on Conservative Thought and Environmental Sustainability during the Republican National Convention. The Forum brought together 100 leading conservative economists, policy advocates, funders and business leaders, including R Street, republicEN and Niskanen Center.

Spurring Safer Chemistry Innovations

After 40 years, the Toxic Substances Control Act (TSCA) was finally updated due to the work of ASBC and our allies. ASBC mobilized members to lobby the Senate several times, and with our Companies for Safer Chemicals campaign, ASBC strengthened TSCA’s transparency and maintained states’ authority to regulate toxic chemicals. While we were not able to require the EPA to increase the pace at which it reviews potentially dangerous chemicals, we did help the EPA gain new authority to regulate the worst chemicals in commerce. ASBC also helped repel a Congressional attack on EPA’s Safer Choice program with our timely push to remove a damaging amendment in a year-end spending bill. ASBC forged an unlikely partnership with the Consumer Specialty Product Association, sent a strong letter signed by more than 60 companies to Congress, and met with Congressional leaders including Republican Hal Rogers and Democrat Nita Lowey, to make the business case for the voluntary labeling program. Given the new Administration’s opposition to EPA functions, our common-sense public policy and regulation ideas will empower responsible businesses to resist roll-backs.

Accomplishments in 2016

Left: ASBC co-sponsored a mission to Spain to explore opportunities for sustainable trade. Left to Right: Keith Silver, Deputy Senior Commercial Officer, U.S. Embassy; David Levine, CEO, ASBC; Manuel Baltar, President, Deputation of Ourense; Representative Loretta Sánchez, California; Juan Verde, President, Advanced Leadership Foundation  Right: ASBC members visiting Congressman Pallone during the ASBC 2016 SustyBiz Summit
Connecting Water and Business Imperatives

In 2016, ASBC continued to voice members’ concerns about nationwide water supply contamination caused by decaying water infrastructure and runoff pollution. We made sure policymakers were aware of business community support for the Clean Water Rule by drafting op-eds and sign-on letters. ASBC also helped produce the amicus brief to the 6th Circuit Court of Appeals, endorsed by 150 businesses, that made the case for maintaining the Clean Water Rule.

As part of ASBC’s national “Clean Water is Good for Business” campaign, we convened a cross-sector working group of business leaders to develop state-specific policy recommendations for the Mississippi River Valley region. We also began a new initiative to connect business organizations in New England to explore innovative solutions to their region’s water challenges. We drew national attention from both policymakers and environmental groups when we brought business leaders to Capitol Hill, resulting in passage of the Water Resources Defense Act.

Access to Capital for Sustainable Business

In 2016, ASBC worked to boost federal action on a make-or-break problem facing nearly half of small business owners: barriers to affordable capital. Businesses owned by women and minorities face even greater barriers: In 2016, only 26 percent of all SBA loans made under the SBA 7(a) loan program went to minority-owned businesses and only 18 percent went to woman-owned businesses. Given the U.S. population of 38 percent minority and 51 percent female, ASBC believes these SBA numbers suggest a profound mismatch between need and allocation of loan capital.

Through our Working Group on Women, ASBC issued a widely distributed report, “Closing the Funding and Opportunity Gaps for Women and Minority-Owned Businesses.” Our report was provided to SBA officials in Washington, D.C. and to SBA regional field offices.

ASBC also held several webinars with financial service firms on how to access federal SBA and USDA programs. Understanding that USDA is a major provider of capital for rural small businesses, ASBC prepared a letter calling on the Secretary to revise the Rural Business Investment Program so that minorities could gain easier access.

After the election, ASBC prepared an op-ed for The Hill encouraging the Trump Administration’s nominee for SBA, Linda McMahon, to expand funding for the SBA microloan program and the 8(a) business development program, and to ensure more government contracts go to small and women-owned businesses in historically underutilized business zones and economically depressed communities.

Finally, ASBC supported the Microloan Modernization Act, which sought to modify SBA’s Microloan Program so that SBA-designated microloan intermediary lenders could expend up to 25% of the grant funds they receive to provide information and technical assistance to small businesses that are their prospective borrowers.
Creating Competitive Advantage through Inclusion and Diversity

In 2016, ASBC’s Diversity & Inclusion Working Group (DIWG) continued to mobilize support for initiatives that advance minority-owned businesses. We hosted several national conference calls to enroll prospective members in ASBC activities, and our Critical Issues Leadership Team, a DIWG subgroup, crafted Principles for an Inclusive and Sustainable Economy, which guides our organizational and campaign efforts.

Working with the White House, we convened ASBC business members Ben & Jerry’s and Greyston Bakery, along with Unilever and other companies, to support Ban the Box. This initiative calls upon companies to cease asking prospective new hires about past criminal records until an offer is made. The DIWG also catalyzed a call for action on the hotbed issue of race that led to our sign-on letter with the Respect All campaign.

ASBI’s Working Group for Women (WGFW) provided an ongoing forum for the discussion of key issues impacting women business leaders and women in general. In 2016, our efforts covered women and equity, the on-demand economy, and access to capital, which is now leading to the development of an Invest in Women Initiative. Throughout the year, we were able to provide ongoing leadership opportunities for women business leaders in our advocacy, legislative and media.

ASBC participated in a number of conferences and workshops on procurement policy. We worked with the U.S. Department of Commerce Minority Business Development Agency, the National Minority Supplier Development Council, and others advocating opportunities for minority- and women-owned businesses in a sustainable economy.

Empowering Members to Impact Policy

Throughout the year, ASBC helped members engage with policymakers and articulate the sustainable business agenda. Our annual SustyBiz Summit helped more than 150 members see how Washington works, and hear from elected officials including Senator Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Rep. John Delaney (D-MD) and Rep. Chris Gibson (R-NY), as well as from the Obama Administration. ASBC helped members engage directly through lobby days on Capitol Hill and provide testimony to Congressional and state legislature committees.

ASBC members’ engagement with our policy campaigns have empowered them to present a fresh, accurate view of “what business wants.” Work on the EPA’s Clean Water Rule and regulatory reform led to Frank Knapp, an ASBC member and CEO of South Carolina Small Business Chamber, appearing before House and Senate committees to articulate ASBC’s business case. Our High Road Workplace Project gave our many brand-name business members a national platform to demonstrate their leadership on paid leave, child care, higher minimum wage, responsible contracting, and other sustainable workplace policies. At the state level, ASBC mobilized nearly 100 New York businesses to call for and pass paid leave legislation.

ASBC took a leading role in opposing legal challenges to the Clean Power Plan and the Clean Water Rule. We filed an amicus brief with 25 business organizations coordinated by ASBC in support of the Clean Power Plan. ASBC also mobilized 234 businesses members, including New Belgium Brewing, on behalf of an amicus brief that argued to uphold the Clean Water Rule.
Accomplishments in 2016

Growing Our National Network
Conventional business groups purporting to speak for all business interests often leave responsible company leaders isolated and unheard. ASBC grew their membership in 2016 by networking forward-thinking leaders and amplifying their voices to reach lawmakers. To recruit new members from all regions of the country, we expanded our reach by heavily promoting our convenient webinars and live events on social media, and by partnering with like-minded groups who shared our message with their members. Peer-to-peer interactions at events such as issue-specific meetings in metro areas, our annual SustyBiz Summit in Washington, D.C., along with our concerted outreach campaign, attracted many new companies to ASBC.

ASBC’s prominent new members include SolarCity, the nation’s largest solar energy provider; Care.com, our fourth publicly traded company member; British American Auto Care, our first automotive care service provider; and 50 other responsible companies in many fields that joined in 2016. ASBC also enrolled important business organizations whose members increase our range and impact. These include the Outdoor Industry Association, International Society of Sustainability Professionals, American Solar Energy Association, New Hampshire Businesses for Social Responsibility and New Jersey Sustainable Business Council.

ASBC now has active organizational business members in 35 states, with more in progress, increasing our impact across the nation outside Washington D.C.

SustyBiz: ASBC’s Annual Sustainable Business Summit

ASBC awarded the SUSTY for sustainable business leadership to four exemplary policy makers and corporate executives. Clockwise from upper left: Kelly Vlahakis-Hanks, CEO of Earth Friendly Products, U.S. Senator Jeanne Shaheen, Elanor Starmer of USDA receiving the award on behalf of Secretary Tom Vilsack, and U.S. Representative Chris Gibson.
Accomplishments in 2016

Shaping Public Opinion
To shift the American public’s ideas about “what business wants,” ASBC earned broad, credible media coverage of sustainable business practices and views on public policy. In 2016, ASBC issued scores of news releases on a range of critical issues, featuring company leaders from across the U.S. and representing many business sectors. Our efforts earned ASBC more than 1,000 media mentions and more than 58 million impressions. Media outlets, including Reuters, Associated Press, The Wall Street Journal, The Washington Post, Bloomberg, Businessweek, Politico, and The Hill, regularly quote business leaders put forward by ASBC. Our media efforts resulted in nearly 200 original stories and many more impressions through pick-up by syndicated services. In addition, ASBC placed nearly 150 timely op-eds, columns and letters to the editor in media outlets across the country, all authored by ASBC staff and members.

The New York Times

Selling Shampoo, Eye Cream and a Chemical Crackdown
Feature story on Beautycounter’s advocacy on toxic chemicals quotes ASBC about the need for reform.

Small businesses can expect policy changes under Trump
Associated Press | November 9, 2016
News article surveying a range of opinions from small business community on impact of Trump election. Lead quote by ASBC.

Trump Unveils High-Powered and Well-Heeled Business Council
News article about President-elect Trump’s CEO advisory panel includes critical statement from ASBC.

Environmentalists Outraged Over Trumps EPA Nomination
Newsweek | December 7, 2016
News article lists quotes of groups and well known individual environmentalists opposed to the Scott Pruitt nomination for EPA, and includes a lengthy statement from ASBC.

Wages are increasing, but what’s behind it (Transcript)
National Public Radio
December 29, 2016
News story on NPR’s national show Morning Edition quoted ASBC making the point that increasing wages can increase productivity. (Aired on more than 500 stations; the transcript was posted on more than 75 websites for local and regional NPR stations.)

“Political rhetoric responds to business realities. Members of the American Sustainable Business Council play a crucial role in educating members of Congress about the reality of energy innovation. When those realities come to be seen as opportunities, the political rhetoric will change on climate change.”
- Bob Inglis, former U.S. Representative (R-SC)
Ready to Meet the Challenges Ahead

The current political environment poses enormous challenges to sustainability but at the same time, it offers sustainable business leaders a pivotal opportunity. Legislators on the Right devote most of their attention to the views and demands of business leaders, and legislators on the Left have been slow to see how sustainable business leaders can help advocate for change. To exploit the first condition and hasten the second, ASBC is focused on winning seats at the policymaking table for responsible, sustainable business leaders. To achieve this inclusion of values-based businesses, ASBC has enlightened the media, corporate executives and legislators on how business benefits from triple bottom line policies and practices. Our work has also helped ethical, innovative company leaders step up and forge a new community – in vibrant contrast to powerful, entrenched industry groups that cling to the status quo of short-term profit at any cost. These groups can no longer claim to speak for all businesses or tell lawmakers “what business wants” without ASBC and our members showing up and being heard.

A values-based business approach that factors people and the planet as well as profits into the bottom line was important during the Obama presidency. Since the November election, support for this enlightened approach has become urgent. ASBC will fight to protect the gains of the past eight years – and continue to build for the economy of the future.

Accomplishments in 2016

In 2017, we will continue to provide webinars, live events, e-blast action updates, news releases, sign-on letters, trainings, legislator visits and other tools to keep our influential members informed and engaged. To change the conversation, we’ll bring senior executives as credible spokespeople to the media and elected officials. Outside the Beltway, we will create outposts for sustainability and expand on our connections in 35 states – and we will deploy states’ rights for good outcomes. We will continue making our business case at the federal level, working to advance good policy and supporting legal actions and other advocacy efforts at all levels.

History shows that broadly-shared prosperity, a vibrant market economy, a resilient nation and democracy itself are at risk. Fortunately, our members are unafraid of the high stakes. ASBC will make sure their voices are heard, loud and clear.
Accomplishments in 2016

ASBC Members

BUSINESS LEADER: COMPANIES CONTRIBUTING $10,000 OR MORE
Ben & Jerry's | Bethpage Federal Credit Union | Clif Bar | Dr. Bronner's | Durst Organization | Earth Friendly Products | Eileen Fisher | Klean Kanteen | MCS Industries | Naturepedic | New Belgium Brewing | NRS, Inc. | Patagonia | Perlman & Perlman | Seventh Generation | The Honest Company

BUSINESS ALLY: COMPANIES CONTRIBUTING $2,500 TO $9,999

BUSINESS SUPPORTER: COMPANIES CONTRIBUTING $250 TO $2,499

Organizational Members of American Sustainable Business Council


For a complete list of members and membership benefits, please visit asbcouncil.org.