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CSR & Sustainability
Current State of the Legal Industry Report 2018

This report explores to what extent law firms believe corporate social responsibility & sustainability to be important and its effects on both the bottom line and engagement. The report identifies challenges law firms face as well as factors for success in furthering CSR & sustainability program efforts.
1. Leading Sustainability Efforts

Most firms have leadership guiding their sustainability programs by equity owners, committees, or senior administrators. Sustainability leaders' roles vary, but generally, leaders are providing direction, developing initiatives, measuring and managing programs. Depending on leadership background, focus also varies, from facilities and operations to external client-facing initiatives and broader corporate citizenship.

Source: LFSN Sustainability Survey 2018. Respondents N: 55 Q1: 54
2. Importance to Stakeholders

The majority of firms said sustainability is important to partners, associates, and new and existing clients. Less than 20% believed that sustainability was of little to no importance in each stakeholder group.

Some firms commented that they have other stakeholders that consider sustainability very important, specifically vendors, Millennials and new recruits.
3. RFPs and Sustainability

The vast majority of firms report receiving RFPs or Requests for Information on sustainability policies or values at some point in time. There are some firms who receive these requests frequently and others that have not received any such requests. Possible factors include clients’ public status, CSR and sustainability goals, and respondents’ awareness of firm’s RFP pipeline.

85% Has Received
19% Receives Majority of the Time
15% Never Received

Q: Does your firm receive RFPs or requests for information that include asking for your firm’s sustainability policies or values?

4. Positive Effects

A majority of firms have seen the positive effects of their sustainability program on the morale of employees, cost efficiencies and firm reputation.

A majority of firms have been less able to identify positive effects on revenue, client attraction, and client retention.

Source: LFSN Sustainability Survey 2018.
A small percentage of firms are seeing a budget increase for their sustainability programs. A majority of firms do not have a specific budget for sustainability programs. There were no reported decreases in sustainability budgets.
6. Challenges

The most cited challenge was overall employee engagement, including, compliance, awareness, apathy, and keeping momentum. Part of the broader engagement scope, firms also struggled with leadership buy-in.

The next most cited challenge was allocating resources, whether budget, staffing or time. Many also struggled with developing a framework around their sustainability program, including how to implement initiatives as well as metrics and business justification.


Q: What are your top 3 challenges in your sustainability program?

Please Rank.

- Employee Engagement: 54% (41% of first rank responses)
- Leadership Buy-In: 8% (23% of first rank responses)
- Resources: 15% (10% of first rank responses)
- ROI, Tracking & Benchmarking: 14% (17% of first rank responses)
- Communication & Awareness: 10% (17% of first rank responses)
- Program Implementation: 14% (10% of first rank responses)
- Program Structure & Organization: 9% (6% of first rank responses)

7. Firm Focus

The most cited focus for 2018 was employee engagement, in line with the most cited challenge. Firms were focusing on program recruiting, program ideas, and communications.

Firms looked to reduce environmental impact through addressing new buildouts, reducing carbon footprint and technology innovations.

Firms are also looking at social impact, in addition to, or to integrate with environmental sustainability initiatives.

The vast majority of firms cited waste/consumption projects as wishlist items, with paper and energy being the most mentioned. Notable wishlist items included gardens, reporting/tracking as well as volunteerism.

Source: LFSN Sustainability Survey 2018. Respondents N: 55  Q8: 24
9. Effectiveness

Almost half of firms believe that their sustainability program is effective, although nearly the same number of firms report that they do not measure the effectiveness of their program.

Q: How effective is your firm's sustainability program?

- Very Effective: 12%
- Moderately Effective: 29%
- Not So Effective as We Would like: 17%
- We Don't Measure Effectiveness: 42%

10. Success Factors

Most firms identified senior executive support as one of the most important factors to a successful program. Many firms also cited this as one of the top 3 challenges.

Q. What factors contribute the most to a successful sustainability program?

- 80% Senior Executive Support
- 65% Communication & Engagement
- 43% Impact on Revenue

The vast majority of firms believe that the sharing of best practices in the industry would be useful. More than half would find it useful to track sustainability information.

Q. Which of these would be useful for your sustainability program?

- Becoming Certified: 13%
- Benchmarking with a Scorecard: 38%
- Best Practices: 73%
- Carbon Footprinting: 24%
- Finding Sustainable Vendors: 42%
- UNSD Goals: 11%
- Tracking Sustainability Information: 56%

Source: LFSN Sustainability Survey 2018. Respondents N: 55  Q11: 45
A majority of firms believe that the outlook for sustainability in law firms is good in the near future. Less than 10% believe the outlook is poor.

Q. What do you think is the outlook for sustainability programs in law firms over the next 2-3 years?

13. Key Issues for Legal Sector

A majority of firms believes the legal industry should tackle waste and consumption. More than half that cited consumption believe that paper consumption should be a focus.

Some firms would like to see the legal industry address commercial tenant issues and policy.

Q. What sustainability issue do you think the legal industry should tackle? Is your firm supportive of this issue?


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What we do.

The LFSN is in part supported by the generosity of the Leadership Council of Firms

Dedicated to law firm sustainability

LFSN members include many of the top US law firms committed to promoting environmental sustainability and corporate social responsibility in the legal industry.

Committed to improvement

ALISS is an online self-assessment tool used by firms to measure key aspects of sustainability and to identify specific areas of strength and opportunities for improvement.

Devoted to knowledge-sharing

LFSN fosters knowledge sharing and collaboration through webinars, roundtables and resources, including on-demand learning and case studies that explore a wide-range of sustainability topics.
The Law Firm Sustainability Network conducted an online survey from May – July 2018. Fifty-three US-based law firms responded. A majority of law firms respondents are from leading US or global law firms with 250-1,000+ attorneys. Questions and categories are listed in the order that they were presented in the survey, excluding Challenges question, in which categories are listed by highest to lowest percentage cited mentions.

The LFSN CSR & Sustainability Current State of the Legal Industry 2018 Survey was conducted in collaboration with Pamela Cone, a graduate student in Corporate Social Responsibility and Founder and CEO of Amity Advisory.

EcoAnalyze’s employee engagement tools were used to conduct the LFSN Survey.