



California Green Business Program

When it comes to smart growth, the City of Santa Cruz means business – green business. Through the California Green Business Program the City joined a rich network of environmentally friendly small and medium-sized businesses driving the green economy. What started in 1995 in Sonoma as a certification program has since reached small to medium enterprises across all nine bay area counties, and accredited over 3,500 certified businesses in California alone. By creating and setting a benchmark in the Bay Area, the California Green Business Program has become a renowned model for positive environmental business practices and resource management.

Case study

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History of Green Business Program

Green certifications for businesses and products emerged in the 1970s, primarily in the form of self-certifications, as a means to ensure environmentally friendly and sustainable business practices. By the 1990s, increasing concern for climate change and greenhouse gas reductions incited a wave of third party certifications that became increasingly popular as a way to indicate businesses and products environmental impact.



Population / Land Area
65,021 / 15.83 sq. mi

Map: Wikipedia

The California Green Business Program is one such certification program, which started in Sonoma in 1995, and now operates state-wide. Today the program spans all nine Bay Area counties, and has certified over 3,500 businesses statewide since its inception. The City of Santa Cruz commenced its Green Business Program in 2006. Within a decade, the City hosted a total of 200 certified businesses, and has since continued to grow.



The City's Program

The process for certification under the Green Business Program includes five straightforward steps, including registration, the receipt of a standards checklist, audit, and applying concurrent recommendations necessary for certification. Small and medium-sized businesses simply register online via the California Green Business Network website which encompasses tailored information pertinent to their jurisdiction. Aside from enabling businesses to demonstrate environmental accountability, businesses benefit from technical assistance, rebate information, and money-saving tips.

A pillar of the Green Business Program's success is its comprehensive auditing support services, whereby a team of auditors conduct initial evaluations of each registered businesses according to four main categories, namely, water, pollution prevention and wastewater, energy and waste reduction. In addition, sector-specific auditors conduct regular audits as needed, depending on the progress of a business and ability to complete the Green Business Program checklist. Auditors support businesses' green certification via recommendations. If businesses fail to implement these, they are prompted to enter a 'certification pending queue', along with further meetings with the local program auditor to assess needed requirements for certification. Upon completion, certified businesses are rewarded for their positive green contributions to the planet, via official award presentation hosted by the local City Council and Mayor. Recertification is necessary after every four years to ensure the businesses continue to adhere to existing and new Program requirements.

In order to spark local certification, counties have applied a range of awareness raising mechanisms, including webinars in the case of Santa Barbara, and cohort, as applied by Santa Cruz, wherein staff and business owners have the opportunity to coalesce and collaborate on the checklist. City and County of Santa Cruz collaborate together and hold Green Business lunch & learn luncheons and annual mixers. In addition, City's host "challenges" to incite the uptake of green business practices, for example, the City of Santa Cruz's Downtown Business Challenge held in 2016 and the Green Wharf Challenge in 2015. Typically, these challenges target economic areas in need of economic green growth stimulation, or a specific business sector such as hospitality.

It has been an absolute pleasure working with all of the people involved with the Green Business Program. Everyone is bright, cooperative, energetic and willing to assist us with every step along the way to becoming GREEN. We feel being Green helps to conserve the earth's resources and is a good way to be environmentally responsible. We have also started saving more money. Keep up the great work. Let's get all of Santa Cruz and Monterey GREEN!

—Henry and Lisa Carter, Owners

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Budget and Finance

The Green Business Program is funded through the City with collaboration from key departments active in environmental protection and resource efficiency, for example those overseeing water conservation and wastewater management. Utilities, such as PG&E as is the case for Santa Cruz, provide grant funding for the energy audit and technical support on an annual basis.

For related initiatives, such as outreach, were funded through enterprise fund and Measure E, covering networking mixers, presentations, marketing, best practices and rebate programs. The program also cooperates with local partners such as Ecology Action. Ecology Action works in the SC area and offers direct installations for lighting, and energy audits free of cost through PG&E funding. Additionally, green certified businesses and certified restaurants have also been known to sponsor, or host events.

Conclusion

The Green Business Program in Santa Cruz has proved to be a successful model of encouragement for businesses around the county to achieve and demonstrate innovative, environmental leadership, with promising potential for further expansion.

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