



**USGBC South Florida**  
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## Our Members Speak Volumes! And We're Listening!

By any standards, the US Green Building Council South Florida Chapter received a solid response to our first-ever membership survey.

An impressive 215 members completed the Chapter's first membership survey, conducted last Summer. The 15% response rate was extremely respectable, allowing the Chapter's volunteer leadership -- and perhaps the USGBC in Washington, DC -- to confidently use these results to gauge members' feelings about a great many issues, as well as to help the volunteer leadership chart the future path of our nonprofit organization here in South Florida .

What have we learned? Many things, but after breaking down and studying the survey results, the Chapter's volunteer leadership has put together this snapshot of results to share with our valued members:

- 43.6% of our members have been with us two years or more -- a solid base. However, 53.9% have been with us one year or less. That tells us that we've done a better job of recruiting in the past year than in prior years, but we need to pay attention to the newbies or we'll lose a higher percentage of our members in the future. (Statistics show that if individuals renew their membership once, they will be significantly more likely to renew thereafter.) A rather amazing 50% of those who didn't renew their memberships ... forgot to do so! That should bode well for the Chapter's recent shift to auto-generated renewal notices and salvage emails. 33% indicated that they didn't renew because they couldn't take advantage of programs or benefits -- in this regard, our leadership has poured through the survey results, including the open-ended comments, and are meticulously crafting a membership platform that encompasses many of the more do-able suggestions. Realizing that fiscal restraints must be considered (especially in these tough economic times), the Board already has moved proactively on some of the stronger suggestions -- e.g., creating an online, searchable membership database as a new membership benefit; revamping our educational program; shoring up our Branch structure and presentations. The good news is that 96.1% of our members indicated that they intended to renew their current membership, and 86.6% feel that they receive adequate value for their Chapter membership. Those are strong and encouraging numbers that the Chapter is doing a lot of things right, and that our Chapter family continues to grow despite times.

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- The USGBCSF is more widely represented by industries and business than perhaps we thought, but it isn't surprising that architects and contractors/builders together topped the listing of professions of our members, each with 16.2%. The always intriguing yet amorphous "consultant" came in the third spot in this list at 13.2%. The categories of Product Manufacturer, Service Contractor or Distributor and Engineer were fourth at 9.8%
- 64.9% of our members characterize their Chapter activity as either moderately involved or largely dedicated. That leaves 35% as having zero or low activity with our Chapter -- a high-ish percentage that ignited a healthy Board discussion that could be titled "How can we engage these uninvolved yet valued members?" It's the right conversation for the leadership to have -- for our members and for the Chapter, for if we're successful in addressing that question, we will see a much higher renewal percentage and a happier membership core. As always, it's important to always remember that ours is a nonprofit organization with comparatively few revenue centers, so a pleased and involved membership is the key to our future.
- How do individuals find the USGBCSF? Amongst various avenues noted, kudos to the strength of the USGBC and LEED brands -- a whopping 44.3% heard about our Chapter through those two powerful entities. Don't ever doubt the value of the esteemed USGBC brand (34.5%)! In this respect, the high visibility and positive PR associated with our "parent" organization serves the local Chapter very well. Of the other sources of "finding" our Chapter, the one that most perplexed the Board was that only 5.1% of our members were recruited by other members. With our strong Branch structure and emphasis on social networking (another survey urging) and other outreach avenues, that should be higher, and the Board is looking into several manners in which we might engage our members to be our best recruiters.
- Our message tied to the greater good of the planet and future generations -- i.e., doing the right green thing -- rings strong, as 76.7% of members included "personally interested" as to why they joined the Chapter, and 69.1% of respondents listed "being part of an organization that values the environment" as their highest component of membership satisfaction -- and there was no close second place. 59.7% included networking as among the reasons they joined, and a healthy 46.2% felt that being a member was important to their jobs.
- 52.6% of our members are between the ages of 40 and 60, and 36.5% are under the age of 40. The membership split by gender surprised the Board (female, 35.6%; male, 64.4%). Ours is a well-educated bunch -- almost three out of five members have completed college, and an impressive 31.5% members have attained a post-graduate degree. It was opined in one follow-up meeting that these numbers show that our membership is in a higher demographic arena than the majority of the population -- a "smarts" plus for many reasons (e.g., marketing, networking, fund raising).
- 39.1% of our members attend Branch meetings between 7-12 times a year -- that's the good news. The "opportunity" news? Only 32.9% attend between 1-3 Branch meetings a year, and a disappointing 11.1% never attend the monthly meetings. (16.9% attend 4-6 meetings a year.) 21.7% of our members attend multiple Branches' meetings -- a number that is likely somewhat skewed by the likely high number of Board and Branch members who took the survey; however, even if as much as 10% of that group accounted for that

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percentage, that's still a solid result, indicating that our members will travel to hear good speakers and tour green buildings. Our Board's strategy and goal? Strengthen our education programs at the Branch level; do a better job of publicizing those programs; inject more of "wow and fun" elements into the monthly meetings; and keep listening and looking for ways to construct that green bridge from our wonderful Branch families to the lives our uninitiated members and communities.

- 62.5% of our members find the Branch meetings' education component moderately to extremely useful/valuable. On learning this very-good-but-not-great percentage, the Board immediately convened the new Branch leadership and set about tasking individuals to further strengthen the quality of our programs. While networking is clearly a high priority for our members, the 52.4% who graded it moderately to extremely useful/valuable at the Branch meetings was lower than expected. Interestingly, other parts of the survey implied that members "graded" networking's value higher. The survey told us what nights we should be meeting (Tuesdays and Wednesdays), that we should perhaps stay away from Monday nights (and opt for Thursday instead), and that perhaps we should be starting meetings a tad earlier. We also learned (through the open-ended comments) that some of our members want us to occasionally hold meetings at times other than evenings, and that we need to occasionally consider distant locations (e.g., the upper Keys) and more centralized meeting venues. We have also learned (again, through comments) that some of our members are disgruntled with us when we don't start meetings on time, and that they do not at all appreciate meetings that have an even modest emphasis on presentation of Branch business, especially if it takes time away from speakers and the educational component of their very valuable evenings. The good news is that these are things that the Board and Branch leadership addressed right away, and hopefully that change has been noticed and appreciated.
- The Chapter received across-the-board affirmation of the importance of those benefits that we suspected were at the top of our members' value list -- our website and National's, Branch meetings, and tours all were named as being of "high importance" to our members. Best practices, networking and educational programs and workshops were each named a notch higher in value -- all in the 60+ percentile of "high importance" items.
- Throughout the survey, members spoke clearly about their wishlist of benefits. Nearly all of their high preferences were tied to data and information -- they want to see an online membership directory (named on 60.6% of responses as being Very Important ... and done!); various online communities (52.8%); a database of green building case studies (68.5%); and a database of local/regional green projects (78.6%). The Board continues to pull through and examine the members' wishlist items, including, of course, those ranked "somewhat important", trying to determine those that should logically command our attention and time versus perhaps some other projects and efforts that are less important to our members. As one Board member put it, "The bottom line is that we can't do everything, so let's pick the low-hanging fruit, do the things at which we excel that our members want, concentrate on what new things our members desire, and perhaps think about backing away from some activities that take away from what should be our true priorities." That's sound direction and a proactive approach ... and is ongoing.

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- Members embraced the Chapter's role in local and state legislative advocacy by virtue of their high marks for green policy objectives. Three of four members indicated that educating state and local officials and agencies about the USGBC, LEED and other green building benefits was of "high importance". Our members clearly want us in these advocacy positions, and the Chapter will, therefore, strive to do a better job of informing our members of our efforts and successes, as well as engaging them in our advocacy endeavors.
- Our members gave a hardy thumb's up to USGBC National's strategic goals -- all of which received rankings of higher than 90% in terms of them being somewhat-to-very important initiatives.
- 9% of respondents ranked their green-building knowledge at Beginner; 56% felt theirs was at Intermediate; and a somewhat surprising 35% rated themselves as Advanced. Judging from our members' wishes and wants expressed throughout the survey, they all thirst for more knowledge and technical information. And, clearly, our members are strongly opinionated as to what they want to see the Chapter deliver in the way of classes, benefits, advocacy, etc. As a result, the Board has set up and charged various committee and task forces with addressing education, with tangible results and offerings expected to debut beginning in the second quarter of 2010.
- What else did we learn about our educational programs? Here are a few interesting facts that will help us shape our future education efforts. Consider that:
  - There are more contractors/builders (tied with architects) than any other category.
  - There are as many product manufacturers, service contractors or distributors as there are engineers.
  - Educational Programs and Workshops both received high marks as priorities from respondents.
  - The Chapter has probably been making the wrong assumptions about what kinds of workshops we should present. The LEED Implementation Process, Costs, Energy Modeling and Integrated Approach to LEED Projects is what our members appear to want. In terms of types of projects, green homes are very much an item of interest.
- With a bit of conjecture, the survey helped us better assess the educational wants and needs of our members. The last two or so years have seen the majority of our members get exposed to LEED and green building in their daily work, or by studying the rating system with an eye toward professional accreditation. After this learning curve, a large degree of our focus now should be on the advanced processes, best practices and technologies that can solidify green building into a competitive advantage for them. Perhaps no longer should we be prioritizing (clearly, we still need to offer them) "Technical Review"-type workshops, since these exam-driven classes are based on the "floor" of what a green building should be, focused on the rating system, the "code" of sorts. As green building and LEED itself evolves into higher levels of energy, site, water and materials efficiency, we should find ways to equip our members with the knowledge and tools to participate in this market mini-revolution (e.g., solar PV systems, water

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conservation, net-zero energy systems, the 2030 challenge, climate change and the imminent carbon markets, lighting, building science and envelope are some of the top-rated topics). We mustn't lose sight, however, of the fact that a decent percentage of our members will always want to be exposed to core strategies and knowledge ... and the ability to raise their chances of passing various exams.

- LEED Implementation Process, Costs, Energy Modeling and an Integrated Approach to LEED projects are some of the managerial topics our members want to learn about. In terms of building typology, green homes (both for new homes and for existing ones) are an underserved area. In this and as per above, our nascent Residential Green Building efforts must help ramp up our efforts to attract excellent speakers to our area about this.
- The survey clearly indicates that the Chapter should strive, with the educational programs we provide, to offer continuing education credits on sustainable design toward the maintenance of one's LEED AP status, as well as AIA/CES, as appropriate. That will be accomplished in 2010.
- Clearly, there many professional organizations with which our Chapter should be more actively seeking partnerships and affiliation -- as evidenced by the healthy mix of organizations to which our members belong. Working to establishing collaborative relationships and memorandums of understanding with sister organizations will thus become a Board goal in 2010 and beyond.

The most successful nonprofit membership organizations are those whose management team can "read" their membership's potential and its underlying needs -- and then proactively respond with appropriate services and answers. With these first-ever survey results in hand, your elected volunteer leadership is working hard to take these results and use them as a guide for years to come as we rededicate the organization to our number-one priority -- our members.

If you took the time to respond to our survey, the Chapter's leadership thanks you. You have played a key role in shaping the future of your US Green Building Council South Florida Chapter. As always, should you have any questions, concerns or suggestions as to how we can better serve our members and our South Florida community, please let us hear from you. It is your valuable feedback -- delivered via survey, email, call or meeting -- that will help us craft practices and initiatives to educate, enlighten and empower our region to adopt an approach to building that is both ecologically and economically sustainable.

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