



Resource Guide

Influencing Social & Environmental Standards



Why influence industry standards?

When businesses work to influence social and environmental standards, the voice of the business community becomes louder and more difficult for policymakers to ignore. Engaging in advocacy ensures that businesses position themselves to have a direct say in the “carrots” and “sticks” adopted by policymakers in local, state, and federal business regulations. Businesses also have the opportunity to engage employees, customers, and the community at large around social and environmental issues.

Not only can advocacy increase brand awareness and customer loyalty for individual businesses, collective action in the business community can offer solutions to some of the world’s largest and most urgent problems.

Policy tools to influence standards

No matter what role you occupy, you have tools at your disposal to begin a shift in standards. Of course, change rarely occurs from one organization or individual. [BALLE](#) assembled a graphic that illustrates the various roles that individuals and institutions can play in collaborating to accelerate a positive impact they seek in their local community. These roles include, among others:

- Anchor institutions (e.g. those in education and healthcare) and locally-owned business networks have the access and pull to lead the charge to co-create policy.
- Those in the entrepreneur education and technical assistance fields can assist with legal, capital, and structural issues.
- Local government can support through zoning and regulation.
- Workers and labor can work with management to share ownership in individual businesses.
- Community capital organizations (e.g. Co-op Funds and philanthropists) can leverage their investments locally and prioritize beneficial practices in the initiatives they support.
- Those in the media and arts fields can focus on storytelling and creating the change narrative for how the action is playing out in the local economy.

Case Studies

- **Cabot Creamery** hosts co-op summits to discuss the economic competitiveness and benefits of the co-op model and to spread this practice throughout their industry ([read more](#)).
- **Cascade Engineering** is a plastics manufacturer that often advocates for higher social and environmental standards for their industry even though others in their industry resist ([read more](#)).

- **R2L Restaurant and the Wage Change initiative.** In October 2016, Daniel Stern, chef of R2L, increased the minimum wage of non-tipped workers to \$14/hr instead of waiting for wage equity policies to be passed ([read more](#)). Similarly, Wage Change, a non-partisan initiative led by small businesses is pledging to gradually increase the hourly wages of their employees. Creating a list of participating businesses allows consumers to shop with their values ([read more](#)). In both cases, these business owners can serve as the proof of concept for local policymakers.

The Ladder of Influence - Steps to influencing standards

Rung 1: *Establish Your Position* - Where do you want to influence standards? (e.g. I want to support livable wages for workers.)

Rung 2: *Be the Proof of Concept* - How can you use your business to demonstrate your position? (e.g. I pay my workers a livable wage.)

Rung 3: *Engage Consumer Base and Community* - How can you engage consumers and community through values-based consumerism? (e.g. I communicate to consumers and my community that supporting my business is supporting the movement to pay a livable wage. I educate employees and customers through storytelling and through signs and events at my business. This sets my business apart from my competitor in the eyes of many consumers.)

Rung 4: *Partner with Non-profit NGOs* - What organizations are devoting resources to your cause and how can you leverage their expertise? (e.g. I joined a membership organization that is working with and on behalf of my business to create a regulatory climate that incentivizes my decision to pay a livable wage.)

Rung 5: *Direct Lobbying* - When you get a seat at the table, what will you ask for?

Resources

- Harvard Business Review describes [How Companies Can Champion Sustainable Development](#)
- David Brodwin, co-founder of the American Sustainable Business Council, writes [Policy Change for Local Living Economies](#)
- The [Institute for Local Self-Reliance \(ILSR\)](#) provides policy tools and research to support local economy policy initiatives
- Entrepreneur describes how companies [can engage their customers in social good](#).

Associated Resource Guides

- Screening Suppliers & Purchasing Locally
- Energy Conservation & Efficiency
- Community Engagement Programs
- Ownership, Board, and Supplier Diversity

